

## REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Claims 39-43 are pending in this application and remain rejected for lack of utility. The rejection is respectfully traversed.

### Priority

Previously, Applicants had submitted that they rely on the MLR assay (Example 74), first disclosed in U. S. Application Serial No. 60/100,858 filed September 17, 1998, for patentable utility of their claimed invention. However, the Examiner asserted that the ability of the protein to stimulate lymphocyte proliferation in the MLR assay does not support a specific and substantial utility for the claimed invention. The Examiner says that the MLR assay is an artificial *in vitro* system and does not provide for what specific conditions or diseases the claimed invention would predictably function. The Examiner also quoted excerpts from the "Manual of Clinical Laboratory Immunology, 6th Edition" and further, exemplary references like Kahan *et al.*, Picotti *et al.* and Campo *et al.*, to show that "the ability to increase an *in vitro* graft versus host response may or **may not be reflective of an ability to stimulate an immune response *in vivo*** therefore, it is not predictive and the disclosed results on the MLR assay do not support a specific, substantial and credible utility." For the reasons discussed below, Applicants respectfully traverse this rejection.

### Utility Standard

According to the Utility Examination Guidelines ("Utility Guidelines"), 66 Fed. Reg. 1092 (2001) an invention complies with the utility requirement of 35 U.S.C. § 101, if it has at least one asserted "specific, substantial, and credible utility" or a "well-established utility."

Under the Utility Guidelines, a utility is "specific" when it is particular to the subject matter claimed. For example, it is generally not enough to state that a nucleic acid is useful as a diagnostic without also identifying the conditions that is to be diagnosed.

The requirement of "substantial utility" defines a "real world" use, and derives from the Supreme Court's holding in *Brenner v. Manson*, 383 U.S. 519, 534 (1966) stating that "The basic *quid pro quo* contemplated by the Constitution and the Congress for granting a patent monopoly is the benefit derived by the public from an invention with substantial utility." In explaining the

“substantial utility” standard, M.P.E.P. 2107.01 cautions, however, that Office personnel must be careful not to interpret the phrase “immediate benefit to the public” or similar formulations used in certain court decisions to mean that products or services based on the claimed invention must be “currently available” to the public in order to satisfy the utility requirement. “Rather, any reasonable use that an applicant has identified for the invention that can be viewed as providing a public benefit should be accepted as sufficient, at least with regard to defining a “substantial” utility.” (M.P.E.P. 2107.01, emphasis added.) Indeed, the Guidelines for Examination of Applications for Compliance with the Utility Requirement, set forth in M.P.E.P. 2107 II (B) (1) gives the following instruction to patent examiners: **“If the (A)pplicant has asserted that the claimed invention is useful for any particular practical purpose . . . and the assertion would be considered credible by a person of ordinary skill in the art, do not impose a rejection based on lack of utility.”**

Finally, the Utility Guidelines restate the Patent Office’s long established position that any asserted utility has to be “credible.” “Credibility is assessed from the perspective of one of ordinary skill in the art in view of the disclosure and any other evidence of record . . . that is probative of the Applicant’s assertions.” (M.P.E.P. 2107 II (B) (1) (ii)) Such standard is presumptively satisfied unless the logic underlying the assertion is seriously flawed, or if the facts upon which the assertion is based are inconsistent with the logic underlying the assertion (Revised Interim Utility Guidelines Training Materials, 1999).

To overcome the presumption of truth based on an assertion of utility by the Applicant, the Examiner must establish that **it is more likely than not** that one of ordinary skill in the art would doubt the truth of the statement of utility. **Absolute predictability is not a requirement.**

Only after the Examiner has made a proper *prima facie* showing of lack of utility, does the burden of rebuttal shift to the applicant. The issue will then be decided on the totality of evidence.

Further, the legal standard with respect to *in vitro* or animal model data providing pharmacological activity has been commented on in *Cross v. Iizuka*, 753 F.2d 1040, 1051, 224 USPQ 739, 747-48 (Fed. Cir. 1985):

"We perceive no insurmountable difficulty, under appropriate circumstances, in finding that the first link in the screening chain, *in vitro* testing, may establish a practical utility for the compound in question. Successful *in vitro* testing will marshal resources and direct the expenditure of effort to further *in vivo* testing of the most potent compounds, thereby providing an immediate benefit to the public, analogous to the benefit provided by the showing of an *in vitro* utility."

Furthermore, M.P.E.P. 2107.03 (III) states that:

"If reasonably correlated to the particular therapeutic or pharmacological utility, data generated using *in vitro* assays, or from testing in an animal model or a combination thereof almost invariably will be sufficient to establish therapeutic or pharmacological utility for a compound, composition or process."

Thus, the legal standard accepts that *in vitro* or animal model data is acceptable utility as long as the data is "reasonably correlated" to the pharmacological utility described.

### **Arguments**

#### **A *prima facie* case of lack of utility has not been established**

Applicants submit that a *prima facie* case of lack of utility has not been established based on the cited references Kahan *et al.*, Picotti *et al.* and Campo *et al.* In fact, Applicants submit that the Examiner has failed to point out several instances quoted within these very references wherein the authors stated that MLR is an important method, with a good predictive value, for studying allograft rejections or immunosuppression of graft rejection using test compounds.

For example, Campo *et al.* teach that "the human mixed lymphocyte culture (MLC) is an important method to test donor-recipient compatibility in bone marrow transplantation. It was shown that cytokine release, especially IFN- $\gamma$ , **has a very good predictive value with regard to the transplantation outcome**, as cytokines play a major role in the generation of an alloreactive immune response and for the induction of graft rejection *in vivo*.....Landolfo *et al.* inhibited T-cell reactivity by the addition of anti-IFN- $\gamma$  **both *in vitro* and *in vivo***", (Emphasis added) see page 18, discussion paragraph). Further, Picotti's teachings showed that the  $\beta 1$  subunit of IL-12R was critical for IL-12 driven enhanced alloimmune response *in vitro* and *in vivo* (see abstract). Thus, even the studies quoted by the Examiner showed that the MLR assay gave

predictable results using "test compounds" such as anti-IFN- $\gamma$  antibodies, or the  $\beta$ 1 subunit of IL-12R.

As the Utility Guidelines clearly states "Absolute predictability is not a requirement." Accordingly, one of ordinary skill in the art would not necessarily conclude that the MLR assay is not a predictive or correlative assay. On the other hand, as will be further apparent from the discussions below, one of ordinary skill in the art would not doubt the truth regarding "immune stimulation" as a utility for PRO217, especially since Picotti's teachings on IL-12 in fact support the Applicants' position. Thus, a *prima facie* case of lack of utility has not been established based on Picotti, Campo and/or Kahan.

#### PRO217 has utility

Without acquiescing to the propriety of this rejection, solely in the interest of expediting prosecution in this case, Applicants submit a declaration and supportive references from the art to support the immunostimulant activity of PRO217.

Applicants submit a declaration by Sherman Fong, Ph.D. of Genentech, Inc., an expert in the field of Immunology and co-inventor of the present application, to show that there are specific immune stimulant utilities for compounds identified by an MLR assay. The Declaration explains how the MLR reaction was performed in the instant application using peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMCs), which contain responder T-cells, and allogenic, pre-treated (irradiated) PBMCs, which predominantly contained dendritic cells. As Dr. Fong emphasizes, immunostimulants are important and are very desirable in the treatment of cancer and in enhancing the effectiveness of previously identified treatments for cancer. Supportive evidence also comes from teachings in the art like Steinman *et al.* (Exhibit B) who states that "...**medicine needs therapies that enhance immunity or resistance to infections and tumors.** (page 1, column 1, line 7; emphasis added)". Further teachings like Peterson *et al.* (Exhibit D) show that, recently, the immune stimulant IL-12, was successfully used in a cancer vaccine trial to treat melanoma. In fact, Picotti's teachings (quoted by the Examiner) similarly showed that IL-12 enhanced *in vitro* and *in vivo* alloimmune response (see abstract). Further, as Dr. Fong explains regarding the IL-12 melanoma trial:

"Due to the immune stimulatory effect of IL-12, **the treatment provided superior results** in comparison to earlier work, where the patients' own dendritic cells were prepared from peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMCs) treated with antigens, then cultured *in vitro* and returned to the patient to stimulate anti-cancer response" (Emphasis added).

Further, Dr. Fong's declaration clearly states that:

"A PRO polypeptide shown to stimulate T-cell proliferation in the MLR assay of the present invention with an activity of at least 180% of the control is expected to have the type of activity exhibited by IL-12 and would find practical utility as an immune stimulant".

Accordingly, the positive results obtained in this assay clearly establish the immunostimulant utility for the polypeptides claimed in the present application, and the specification, in turn, enables one skilled in the art to use the compounds for the asserted purpose. Further, since the legal standard accepts *in vitro* as acceptable utility and the data is "reasonably correlated" to the pharmacological utility based on the discussions above, a valid case for utility has been made and would be considered credible by a person of ordinary skill in the art.

By the foregoing arguments and supportive evidence, Applicants have established that the MLR reaction is a generally recognized assay to assess the immunostimulatory activity. Besides immunostimulatory uses of PRO 217, for example, in the treatment of viral infections like HIV or Epstein Barr viral infections, Applicants assert further utilities for PRO217 in the treatment of cancers like melanoma. Further, One skilled in the art would readily accept that antibodies to PRO217 would have utility as immunosuppressants, for example, to prevent graft rejections.

In view of the foregoing arguments and submitted evidence, the Examiner is respectfully requested to reconsider and withdraw the present rejections.

### **Claim Rejections - 35 U.S.C. §102**

Claim 39 remains rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102 (a) as allegedly being anticipated by Hsieh *et al.* (Nature 398: 431-36, 1999) which discloses a polypeptide with 99.7% sequence identity to SEQ ID NO: 4 of the present application.

In view of the discussions under priority, the "stimulation of proliferation of T-lymphocytes assay" provides patentable utility and has a priority date of September 17, 1998. The effective reference date of Hsieh is 1999 which is after the effective filing date of the present application. Thus, Applicants submit that Hsieh is not a proper prior art reference under § 102(a).

Hence, Applicants respectfully request withdrawal of this rejection.

Claims 39-43 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102 (b) as allegedly being anticipated by Brewer *et al.* (WO 98/54963; published December 10, 1998) which discloses a polypeptide approximately 99% identical to polypeptide of SEQ ID NO: 4 of the present application.

Again, in view of the discussions under priority, the effective filing date of the present application is September 17, 1998. The effective reference date of Brewer is December 10, 1998 which is after the effective filing date of the present application.

Thus, Applicants submit that Brewer is not proper prior art under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) or §102(a) and respectfully request withdrawal of this rejection.

The present application is believed to be in *prima facie* condition for allowance, and an early action to that effect is respectfully solicited.

Please charge any additional fees, including any fees for additional extension of time, or credit overpayment to Deposit Account No. 08-1641 (Attorney's Docket No. 39780-1618 P2C8).

Please direct any calls in connection with this application to the undersigned at the number provided below.

Respectfully submitted,

Date: September 2, 2004

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# Proliferative Assays for T Cell Function

UNIT 3.12

A number of agents can specifically or nonspecifically induce T cell activation, resulting in cytokine production, cytokine receptor expression, and ultimately proliferation of the activated T cells. Although proliferation is not a specific effector function of T lymphocytes—in contrast to helper function for B lymphocytes (UNIT 3.10) or cytotoxicity (UNIT 3.11)—proliferation assays are reliable, simple, and easy to perform and have been widely used to assess the overall immunocompetence of an animal. In addition, the assays described in this unit form the basis for identifying the appropriate cellular population that might be used to obtain T cell clones (UNIT 3.13) or T cell hybridomas (UNIT 3.14).

The assays have been divided into two groups on the basis of whether they are used to stimulate primed or unprimed T lymphocytes. The first basic protocol describes the use of agents that are capable of activating unprimed T lymphocytes in culture either by pharmacologic means (calcium ionophore and phorbol ester stimulation), by direct cross-linking of the T cell receptor (TCR) on a large percentage of responder cells (anti-CD3, anti-TCR- $\gamma\delta$ , or anti-TCR- $\alpha\beta$  monoclonal antibodies), by cross-linking the receptors on certain subpopulations of T cells with monoclonal antibodies specific for the V regions of  $\beta$  chains of the TCR (anti-V $\beta$ ) or with enterotoxins specific for certain V $\beta$ -chain regions, or by indirectly cross-linking the TCR (lectins or monoclonal antibodies to non-TCR antigens). The first alternate protocol describes the use of plate-bound antibodies specific for the TCR to stimulate proliferation. The second alternate protocol describes the activation of unprimed T cells to cell-associated antigens in the mixed leukocyte reaction (MLR). The first support protocol describes the preparation and use of T cell-depleted accessory or stimulator cells and the second support protocol describes methods for blocking accessory cell proliferation. Finally, the second basic protocol describes the induction of a T cell proliferative response to soluble protein antigens or to cell-associated antigens against which the animal has been primed *in vivo*.

The assays in this unit employ murine T lymphocytes. Induction of proliferative responses of murine B lymphocytes is described in UNIT 3.10. Related assays for use with human peripheral blood lymphocytes are described in UNIT 7.9.

**NOTE:** All solutions and equipment coming into contact with cells must be sterile, and proper sterile technique should be used accordingly.

## ACTIVATION OF UNPRIMED T CELLS

Unprimed T cells can be induced to proliferate by a variety of agents, including pharmacological agents, anti-CD3/TCR or anti-Thy-1 monoclonal antibodies, enterotoxins and lectins. The commentary briefly describes the specificities of these agents, while Table 3.12.1 lists sources and concentrations for use in this protocol. Although this procedure is intended to measure proliferation of T cells specifically, in many cases induction of T cell proliferation is dependent on the presence of non-T cells that function as accessory cells. The latter provide additional costimulatory signals for T cell proliferation as well as cross-link (via their Fc receptors) monoclonal antibodies bound to cell-surface antigens. The requirement for non-T accessory cells varies with the nature of the stimulatory ligand and can range from absolute dependence to accessory cell-independent T cell activation (see Table 3.12.1). The activation is calculated after determining the difference in incorporation of [ $^3$ H]thymidine between stimulated and control cells.

## BASIC PROTOCOL

In Vitro Assays  
for Mouse B and  
T Cell Function

**Table 3.12.1 Agents Used to Activate Unprimed T Cells in Proliferative Assays**

Agent <sup>a</sup>	Source/ cat. no. <sup>b</sup>	Concentration	Accessory cells <sup>c</sup>	Mode of action, etc.
PMA	SIG P8139	1-10 ng/ml	No	Use with ionomycin or A23187; pharmacologic
Ionomycin	CAL 407950	200-500 ng/ml	No	Use with PMA; pharmacologic
A23187	CAL 100105	100-500 ng/ml	No	Use with PMA; pharmacologic
PHA	WD HA16	1-5 µg/ml	Yes	Indirect TCR cross-linking
Con A	PH 17-0450-01	1-10 µg/ml	Yes	Indirect TCR cross-linking
Anti-Thy-1	PG mAb-G7	1-50 µg/ml	Yes <sup>c</sup>	Indirect TCR cross-linking
Anti-CD3	PG HM-CD3	0.1-5 µg/ml	Yes <sup>c</sup>	Use plate-bound or soluble; direct TCR cross-linking
Anti-TCR-αβ	PG HM-AB-TCR	0.1-10 µg/ml	Yes <sup>c</sup>	Use plate-bound or soluble; direct TCR cross-linking
Anti-TCR-γδ	PG HM-GD-TCR-1; HM-GD-TCR-3	0.1-100 µg/ml	No	Use plate-bound; direct TCR cross-linking
Anti-Vβ-8.1, 8.2 <sup>c</sup>	PG MM-Vβ-TCR-1	0.1-100 µg/ml	No	Use plate-bound; direct TCR cross-linking
Anti-Vβ-6 <sup>c</sup>	PG RM-Vβ-TCR-2	0.1-100 µg/ml	No	Use plate-bound; direct TCR cross-linking
Anti-Vβ-11	PG RM-Vβ-TCR-3	0.1-100 µg/ml	No	Use plate-bound; direct TCR cross-linking
Staph tox A	TT AT101	1-10 µg/ml	Yes <sup>c</sup>	Vβ-1,3,10,11,17-receptor specificity
Staph tox B	TT BT202; SIG S4881	1-100 µg/ml	Yes <sup>c</sup>	Vβ-3,7,8,17-receptor specificity
Staph tox E	TT ET404	1-10 µg/ml	Yes <sup>c</sup>	Vβ-11,15,17-receptor specificity

<sup>a</sup>Abbreviations: PMA, phorbol 12-myristate 13-acetate; PHA, phytohemagglutinin; Con A, concanavalin A; Staph tox A, B, & E, *Staphylococcus enterotoxins* A, B, & E.

<sup>b</sup>Supplier addresses and phone numbers are provided in APPENDIX 5. Abbreviations: CAL, Calbiochem; PG, Pharmingen; PH, Pharmacia LKB; SIG, Sigma; TT, Toxin Technology; WD, Wellcome Diagnostics.

<sup>c</sup>When using anti-CD3 and anti-TCR antibodies in soluble form (rather than plate-bound), accessory cells are required. When using Staph enterotoxins, accessory cells must express appropriate MHC class II molecules. Accessory cell dependence is not absolute with anti-Thy-1 antibodies.

## Materials

Complete RPMI-5 and RPMI-10 media (APPENDIX 2)

Responder cells: lymphocytes from nonimmunized mouse thymus, spleen, or lymph nodes (UNIT 3.1)

Activating agent(s) (Table 3.12.1)

Phosphate-buffered saline (PBS; APPENDIX 2)

Accessory cells: unfractionated mouse spleen cell suspension, irradiated or treated with mitomycin C (second support protocol) or T cell-depleted (first support protocol)

[<sup>3</sup>H]thymidine (APPENDIX 3)

15- and 4-ml disposable, polystyrene conical tubes with screw caps

Low-speed centrifuge with Sorvall H-1000B rotor (or equivalent)

1-, 5-, and 10-ml disposable polystyrene pipets

96-well flat- or round-bottom microtiter plates with lids (Costar #3596 or #3799)

25- to 100- $\mu$ l single- and multichannel pipettors with disposable tips

Additional reagents and equipment for removing organs (UNIT 1.9), preparing single-cell suspensions (UNIT 3.1), and counting, labeling, and harvesting cells (APPENDIX 3)

1. Prepare responder leukocyte suspensions from thymus, spleen, or lymph node in complete RPMI-5 as described in UNIT 3.1.

*The size of the intended experiment dictates the number of organs to be collected. See annotation to step 3 for an indication of cell number required, and UNIT 3.1 for number of cells per organ. Spleen, thymus, and lymph node can be used as responder cells, while only spleen is a source of accessory cells. Purified T cells or subpopulations of T cells (i.e., CD4<sup>+</sup> or CD8<sup>+</sup>) cells may also be used. See UNITS 3.1-3.6 for enrichment/depletion methods.*

2. Centrifuge single-cell suspensions in 15-ml conical tubes for 10 min in Sorvall H-1000B rotor at ~1000 rpm (200  $\times$  g), room temperature, and discard supernatant.
3. Resuspend cell pellet in complete RPMI-5. Count responder cells and adjust to  $\sim 10^6$  cells/ml with complete RPMI-10.

*While this concentration ( $1 \times 10^6$  cells/ml or  $2 \times 10^5$  cells/well) will give satisfactory responses with most cell populations, it is useful to compare 2, 4, and  $8 \times 10^5$  cells per well in initial pilot experiments. If unfractionated spleen or lymph node cells are used as the responder population, sufficient accessory cells are present and there is no need to supplement the cultures with additional cells. However, if highly purified T cells or T cell subpopulations are used as responders, it will be necessary to add non-T accessory cells depending on the nature of the activating agent (see Table 3.12.1). This is most easily accomplished by adding increasing numbers ( $0.1$ ,  $0.5$ , and  $1.0 \times 10^5$ ) of syngeneic spleen (accessory) cells in  $0.1$  ml to  $2 \times 10^5$  T cells in  $0.1$  ml (see first support protocol). Also, a meaningful comparison of the responsiveness of different cell populations requires titrations of both the activating agents as well as the responding cell populations, and a kinetic experiment.*

4. Prepare working solutions of activating agents in 4-ml conical tubes at room temperature as follows. For MAb, toxin, or lectin, make a series of four dilutions from 1 mg/ml stock solutions—e.g., 100, 30, 10, and 3  $\mu$ g/ml in PBS. For the pharmacological agent, make single dilutions of 100 ng/ml solution of PMA and 1  $\mu$ g/ml A23187 (or 4  $\mu$ g/ml ionomycin) in PBS.

*If MAb in supernatant or ascites form are being used, at least four dilutions should also be used. Working solutions should be used immediately, since the various proteins, especially MAb, may bind to the plastic.*

*See Table 3.12.1 for V $\beta$  specificities of staphylococcal enterotoxins. It is essential to verify that the mouse strain employed expresses the MHC class II surface molecules for which the enterotoxin has a specific binding affinity. See Marrack and Kappler (1989) for further discussion of various enterotoxins and their specificities.*

5. Add 20  $\mu$ l of each dilution of activating reagent (MAb, enterotoxin or lectin) to each of three wells of a 96-well flat- or round-bottom microtiter plate. Include control wells with 20  $\mu$ l of PBS only. Add 20  $\mu$ l PMA or calcium ionophore at the single concentration indicated in step 4, as the dose-response curve for these agents is extremely narrow.

*A series of four dilutions will form one row of each microtiter plate, allowing for efficient organization of the plates.*

6. To the wells of the 96-well microtiter plate containing activating agent, add  $2 \times 10^5$  cells in 0.2 ml.
7. Place microtiter plates in a humidified 37°C, 5% CO<sub>2</sub> incubator for 2 to 4 days.

*Optimum culture periods for stimulating cells will vary depending on cell type and laboratory conditions and must be determined empirically (see critical parameters).*

8. Add [<sup>3</sup>H]thymidine to each well. Return the plates to CO<sub>2</sub> incubator to pulse 18 to 24 hr. Harvest cells using a semiautomated sample harvester and measure cpm in  $\beta$  scintillation counter.
- 9a. Compute the data as the difference in cpm of stimulated (experimental) and control (no activating agent added) cultures. This is done by subtracting the arithmetic mean of cpm from triplicate control cultures from the arithmetic mean of cpm from corresponding stimulated cultures. The results are referred to as " $\Delta$  cpm."
- 9b. Alternatively, compute the data as the ratio of cpm of stimulated and control cultures. This is done by dividing the arithmetic mean of cpm from stimulated cultures by the arithmetic mean of cpm from control cultures. The results are referred to "SI" (stimulation index).

*The second method (step 9b) has the disadvantage that small changes in background values will result in large changes in SI and should be interpreted with caution. In most publications,  $\Delta$  cpm rather than SI values are preferred.*

#### ALTERNATE PROTOCOL

### ACTIVATION OF UNPRIMED T CELLS WITH PLATE-BOUND ANTIBODIES

Although it is possible to induce T cell activation with monoclonal antibodies to the CD3/TCR complex in solution during culture, such activation depends on cross-linking of the antibody by Fc receptor-bearing accessory cells. This protocol describes the use of monoclonal antibodies to the CD3/TCR complex by coupling them to the wells of the microtiter plates. The T cell proliferative response induced under these conditions does not require the presence of significant numbers of accessory cells, although the responses obtained may be suboptimal (Jenkins et al., 1990).

Use of this protocol is recommended for use with those antibodies to the CD3/TCR complex which bind poorly to the Fc receptor present on murine accessory cells and which do not induce T cell activation in soluble form. Although all monoclonal antibodies readily couple to plastic under these conditions, it is very difficult to induce a proliferative response with certain antibodies such as the G7, anti-Thy-1 monoclonal antibody. In such cases, the conditions described in the basic protocol should be followed.

### Additional Materials

PBS (APPENDIX 2), room temperature and 4°C

1 mg/ml purified anti-CD3 or anti-TCR MAb in PBS (for nonspecific activation of T cells) or 1 mg/ml purified anti-V $\beta$  or anti-TCR- $\gamma\delta$  MAb in PBS (for activation of T cells with specific receptors; see Table 3.12.1)

1. In 4-ml conical polystyrene tubes, prepare a series of four dilutions of MAb from sterile 1 mg/ml stock solutions—e.g., 100, 10, 1, and 0.1  $\mu$ g/ml—using room temperature PBS.

*Sources and recommended concentrations of monoclonal antibodies can be found in Table 3.12.1; since MAb will bind to plastic, the working dilutions should be used immediately.*

*The ability of anti-TCR antibodies to cross-link receptor molecules varies depending on the purity of the MAb preparation and the affinity of the MAb for the TCR/CD3 complex. Optimum dilutions will have to be determined in dose-response experiments. Alternatively, preparations of ascites fluid from the MAb can be tested at different dilutions (e.g., 1:100, 1:200, 1:400, and 1:800), but use of purified antibody will allow for better standardization of the assay.*

*Because the efficacy of MAb-induced activation depends on the amount of antibody bound to the bottom of the wells, it is crucial to make the dilutions in a buffer without any additional source of proteins such as FCS or albumin; these would compete with the binding of the antibody, and therefore reduce the responsiveness. For this reason, it is also not recommended to perform the assay with culture supernatants of the appropriate hybridomas.*

2. Add 30  $\mu$ l of each concentration of MAb solution to each of three wells of a 96-well round-bottom microtiter plate. Include control wells of 30  $\mu$ l PBS only.

*A series of four dilutions will form one row of each plate, allowing for efficient organization of the plates. Consistently better responses are seen with round-bottom (compared with flat-bottom) plates in antibody-mediated experiments.*

*Most often, optimal responses are seen with 10  $\mu$ g/ml antibody. There is no point in adding more than the indicated amount of antibody, since the maximum amount that can bind to surface of the wells is ~2 to 3  $\mu$ g (A.M.K., unpub. observ.).*

3. Cover the plate and gently tap its side to ensure complete covering of the bottom of the wells. Incubate plates 90 min at 37°C. During incubation, proceed to step 4.

*During this incubation, the antibodies bind to the plastic in the wells for subsequent cross-linking of the T cell receptors on responding T cells. Plates can also be prepared the night before an experiment and kept in the refrigerator overnight, after the 37°C incubation.*

4. Prepare responder cell suspensions as in steps 1 to 3 of the basic protocol.

*Highly purified T cell populations can be used in these studies as the proliferative response induced is accessory cell-independent. However, the presence of non-T accessory cells does not interfere with the proliferative response.*

5. Wash the wells of the incubated plates by adding 200  $\mu$ l cold PBS and inverting the plates with a flick of the hand on a stack of paper towels placed in a tissue culture hood. Repeat washing procedure two more times to remove excess antibody.

6. To the wells of the washed plates, add  $\sim 2 \times 10^5$  cells in 0.2 ml.

*If cells are not ready at this stage, plates may be kept in the refrigerator overnight after 100  $\mu$ l PBS has been added. Presumably, longer storage periods should be acceptable, but our experience is limited to  $\leq 4$  day periods. The PBS should be removed before the cells are added.*

*Most cell populations will give peak responsiveness at this cell dosage, but pilot experiments should be performed to establish optimal conditions.*

7. Proceed as in steps 7 to 9 of the basic protocol, but incubate cultures for 2 to 3 days before adding [<sup>3</sup>H]thymidine.

*Kinetic assays should be performed to determine the optimum culture period.*

## ALTERNATE PROTOCOL

### T CELL PROLIFERATION IN MIXED LYMPHOCYTE CULTURES

In the mixed lymphocyte culture (MLC) or reaction (MLR), suspensions of responder T cells are cultured with allogeneic stimulator lymphocytes. The activating stimulus is the foreign histocompatibility antigen (usually MHC class I or class II molecules) expressed on the allogeneic stimulator cells. Responder cells need not be primed because a sufficiently high number of T cells in the MLC will respond to the stimulator population. If the stimulator cell population contains T cells, their uptake of [<sup>3</sup>H]thymidine must be prevented by irradiation or treatment with mitomycin C; alternatively the stimulator cell suspension can be depleted of T cells (see support protocols).

#### Additional Materials

Responder cells: lymphocytes from nonimmunized mouse thymus, spleen, or lymph nodes (UNITS 1.9 & 3.1) or purified T cells or T cell subpopulations (UNITS 3.1-3.6)

Stimulator cells: allogeneic mouse spleen cells that differ from the responder cells at *H-2* or *MI* loci, irradiated or treated with mitomycin C (second support protocol) or T cell-depleted (first support protocol)

1. Prepare responder cell populations as in steps 1 to 3 of the basic protocol. Although unfractionated cell populations can be used as responders in certain situations, it may be preferable to use purified T cells or T cell subsets.

*To estimate the MLR of a cell population, it is necessary to perform a dose-response assay with different numbers of responder cells. Typically, three replicate wells are set up containing each of the following: 0.5, 1, 2, and  $4 \times 10^5$  cells (optimal responses are usually obtained with the latter two densities). The setup for these four cell densities will occupy one row (12 wells) of a microtiter plate.*

*For thymocytes, it may be necessary to use  $8 \times 10^5$  cells per well because the frequency of responding T cells is lower; the lowest number of responder cells could then be  $1 \times 10^5$  and the doses in between would be 2 and  $4 \times 10^5$ . Using this range of higher numbers of responder cells may also be preferred when experimental manipulations are expected to reduce the frequency of responding T cells.*

2. To a 96-well microtiter plate, add  $5 \times 10^4$  to  $4 \times 10^5$  responder cells in 0.1 ml to each well. For each experimental group, set up three replicate wells.

*Stimulation of leukocytes for proliferation in 96-well microtiter plates can be run in parallel with cytotoxic T lymphocyte (CTL) generation (UNIT 3.11), which is performed in 24-well microtiter plates. For example, cells can be diluted to  $4 \times 10^6$  cells/ml and added to 24-well plates in 1.0 ml/well for CTL generation and to 96-well plates in 0.1 ml/well for proliferation.*

3. Prepare a single-cell suspension of irradiated or mitomycin C-treated stimulator cells. Alternatively, prepare a suspension of T-cell depleted stimulator cells. Add 0.1 ml to each well of the plates containing responder cells.

*The optimum number of stimulator cells must be determined for each MLC and for different responder cells. For a range of responder cells from  $0.5$ – $4 \times 10^5$ , test stimulator cells at densities of 2, 4, and  $8 \times 10^6$ /ml (i.e., 2, 4, and  $8 \times 10^5$ /well). It should be noted that the stimulator cell suspension provides both the specific antigen to be recognized by the responder T cells as well as nonspecific accessory cells. If*

*highly purified T cells are used as the responder population, it is therefore not necessary to supplement the cultures with non-T accessory cells syngeneic to the responder T cells.*

Separate wells with control cultures should be set up that include—for each dose of responder and stimulator cells—replicate wells of responder cells with irradiated or mitomycin C-treated syngeneic stimulator cells. Values obtained from these controls reflect “background” proliferation values (see step 9 of basic protocol). Other negative controls often included are wells with stimulator cells alone and wells with responder cells alone. These are not used for the calculation of the data, but are useful to compare with the background proliferation values; the latter should not be much higher (<2-fold) than those obtained with stimulator or responder cells alone. Higher background values indicate potential autoreactivity.

4. Follow steps 7 to 9 of the basic protocol, but incubate the cultures for 3 to 6 days.

*Optimum culture periods for stimulating cells will vary depending on cell type and laboratory conditions, and must be determined empirically (see critical parameters).*

## **DEPLETION OF T CELLS FROM ANTIGEN-PRESENTING/STIMULATOR CELL SUSPENSIONS**

## **SUPPORT PROTOCOL**

Although normal unfractionated spleen cell populations can be used as a source of accessory cells, in certain types of experiments it may be preferable to use spleen cell populations from which the T cells have been removed. This procedure ensures that none of the observed proliferative responses of the responder population result from T cell factors derived from the accessory cell population. For example, even T cells whose cell division has been blocked (second support protocol) can produce cytokines. In the following steps, T cell-depleted spleen cell suspensions are prepared using a lytic monoclonal antibody to the T cell antigen, Thy-1. Because almost all the antigen presentation or stimulator cell activity in spleen resides in the non-T cell fraction, this procedure also leads to enrichment of functional antigen-presenting cell function. Further enrichment of antigen-presenting cells (APC) by flotation of the T cell-depleted spleen cells on Percoll gradients is also described. Other procedures leading to enrichment of APC are described elsewhere; the method described in *UNIT 3.7* does not deplete T cells and therefore is not recommended here; the method described in *UNIT 3.15* leads to higher levels of enrichment that are not required in the protocols presented here.

### **Additional Materials**

- Spleen cells from nonimmunized mice
- Hanks balanced salt solution (HBSS; *APPENDIX 2*)
- Low-Tox rabbit complement (Cedarlane #CL3051), reconstituted with ice-cold distilled water and filter-sterilized
- Anti-Thy-1.2 ascites (HO-13-4; ATCC #TIB 99) or anti-Thy-1.1 ascites (HO-22-1; ATCC #TIB 100; alternatively, see Table 3.4.1 for other anti-Thy-1 MAb and *UNIT 2.6* for production of ascites)
- 70% Percoll solution (*UNIT 3.8* and reagents and solutions)

1. Centrifuge the spleen cell suspension derived from single spleen down to a pellet.

*The spleen cells should always be from nonprimed animals and should be syngeneic to the responder T cells unless they are to be used as stimulator cells in the MLC.*

2. To the pellet, add 0.9 ml HBSS, 0.1 ml complement, and 25  $\mu$ l anti-Thy-1 ascites.

*If cells from more than a single spleen are needed, the procedure should be scaled up accordingly.*

**In Vitro Assays  
for Mouse B and  
T Cell Function**

### **3.12.7**



*The choice of anti-Thy-1 reagent to be used depends on the strain of animal from which the spleen was derived. The great majority of commonly available mouse strains (except AKR) express the Thy-1.2 allele.*

3. Incubate the mixture at 45 min in a 37°C water bath.
4. Centrifuge 10 min in Sorvall H-1000B rotor at ~1000 rpm (200 × g), room temperature, and discard supernatant. Resuspend pellet in HBSS and wash two more times.
5. Count viable cells (APPENDIX 3) and resuspend in complete RPMI-10 or PBS for inactivation as in the second support protocol, or in HBSS to prepare low-density accessory cells (see below).

*The T cell-depleted spleen cell population is comprised of B cells, macrophages, and dendritic cells. Further enrichment of cells with enhanced accessory cell function can be obtained by fractionation of this population on Percoll.*

6. Dilute 70% Percoll solution to 55% by mixing 23.58 ml of the 70% Percoll with 6.42 ml HBSS. Resuspend T cell-depleted spleen cells from step 5 in HBSS at  $20 \times 10^6$  cells/ml.
7. Layer 3 ml cell suspension over 3 ml of 55% Percoll solution in a 15-ml conical centrifuge tube.
8. Spin 13 min in H-1000B rotor at 3000 rpm (1900 × g), room temperature.
9. Remove cells that band at the Percoll/HBSS interface with a 5-in. Pasteur pipet and wash 3 times in HBSS as in step 4.
10. Count viable cells and resuspend in complete RPMI-10 for inactivation according to the second support protocol.

*The population obtained from steps 6 to 10 is comprised of large cells including macrophages, dendritic cells, and activated B lymphocytes. This population of cells is enriched in accessory cell function. When used in either of the basic protocols with purified T responder cells, fewer of the Percoll-purified cells should be needed to provide accessory function.*

## SUPPORT PROTOCOL

### BLOCKING CELLULAR DIVISION OF ACCESSORY/STIMULATOR CELLS

There are two situations in which inhibition of accessory or stimulator cell division should be blocked. When purified T cells rather than unfractionated lymphoid populations are used in the basic protocol, cultures are frequently supplemented with accessory cells syngeneic to the responder T cells. If accessory cell DNA synthesis is inhibited, one can then be certain that the resultant proliferative response is comprised entirely of responder T cells and does not contain a component of recruited B cell proliferation derived from the accessory cell populations. In the MLR, the stimulator cells are spleen cells from mice that differ from the responder cells in *H-2* and/or *Mls* gene expression (see APPENDIX 1, Tables A.1C.1 and A.1F.1) and they can also recognize alloantigens on the responder cells. This responsiveness of stimulator cells against responder cells in an MLR (so-called back-stimulation) must be prevented by blocking cellular division. This can be done by treatment of stimulator cells with mitomycin C (a DNA cross-linking reagent) or by irradiation. Many investigators prefer mitomycin C treatment when antigenic differences encoded for by *Mls* genes are to be measured, or when an irradiation source is not available. For more information on the loci encoding *Mls* genes, see Tables A.1F.2 and A.1F.3.

### Mitomycin C Treatment

#### Additional Materials

Mitomycin C (Sigma #M-0503; store in dark)

1. In a 15-ml aluminum foil-wrapped tube, prepare a solution of mitomycin C in PBS at 0.5 mg/ml and filter sterilize.

*Since mitomycin C is very light-sensitive, it is necessary to prepare a fresh stock solution each day for each experiment.*

2. Prepare spleen cell suspension as described in steps 1 and 2 of the basic protocol at a concentration of  $5 \times 10^7$  cells/ml in PBS.
3. Add mitomycin C to a final concentration of 50  $\mu$ g/ml (100  $\mu$ l/ml of cell suspension) and wrap the tube in aluminum foil. Incubate 20 min at 37°C.
4. Add an excess of complete RPMI-5 (i.e., fill tube with ~12 ml) and centrifuge 10 min in Sorvall H-1000B rotor at 1200 rpm ( $300 \times g$ ). Discard supernatant and repeat washing procedure two more times.

*Three washes are crucial, because any traces of mitomycin C left among the cells will reduce proliferative responses when the cells are added to an MLC.*

5. Resuspend pellet in complete RPMI-10. Count cells with hemacytometer. Adjust to desired concentration as described in the annotation to step 6 of the basic protocol.

### Irradiation Treatment

Prepare a spleen cell suspension as described in steps 1 to 3 of the basic protocol, at a final concentration of  $5\text{--}10 \times 10^6$  cells/ml in complete RPMI-10. Using a source of ionizing irradiation ( $^{60}\text{Co}$  or  $^{137}\text{Cs}$   $\gamma$ -irradiator; e.g., Gammacell 1000, Nordion), deliver 1000 to 2000 rad of irradiation to the cells.

This dose range of irradiation is suitable for most immunologic applications employing spleen cell suspensions. However, antigen presentation by different spleen cells is differentially affected by irradiation (Ashwell et al., 1984): at low doses (500 to 1000 rad), antigen-presenting function of B cells is preserved; after doses of 1100 to 2000 rad, a substantial decline is observed; and doses  $>2000$  rad abolish the participation of B cells as APC. Macrophages and dendritic cells, on the other hand, maintain antigen presentation through doses of 3000 rad. To ensure that B cells do not participate in the responses measured, some investigators prefer to use doses of 2000 rad. However, responsiveness to *Mls* antigens can best be measured with stimulator cells that received doses of  $<1000$  rad, since B cells present *Mls* more effectively. Alternatively, *Mls* responsiveness can be measured after mitomycin C treatment of stimulator cells, since it also preserves the antigen-presentation function of B cells.

When transformed cell lines are used as antigen-presenting or accessory cells, higher doses must be used to ensure blockage of cell division. The appropriate dose will have to be determined empirically for each cell line, but is likely to be at least 5000 rad; some transformed cell lines require as much as 10,000 to 12,000 rad, and may be more sensitive to mitomycin C treatment.

### ACTIVATION OF PRIMED T CELLS

Proliferative responses to viruses, protein antigens, minor transplantation antigens, and the male H-Y antigen require in vivo immunization followed by in vitro stimulation. Furthermore, enhanced proliferative responses to those antigens that will generate primary in vitro responses (i.e., MHC antigens) can be obtained by in vivo priming. Multiple immunizations usually elevate in vitro responses.

To immunize animals for in vitro secondary responses to soluble protein antigens or peptides, dissolve antigens and emulsify in complete Freund's adjuvant (UNIT 2.5). For strong responses by draining lymph node cells, immunize animals in a hind footpad. For

### BASIC PROTOCOL

In Vitro Assays  
for Mouse B and  
T Cell Function

3.12.9

strong responses by spleen cells, immunize intraperitoneally. Tail-base immunization also can be used as an efficient route of immunization; follow procedure for intradermal injection. To prime animals against cellular antigens, inject intraperitoneally with  $1-5 \times 10^7$  cells that express the antigen. Immunization protocols are described in UNIT 1.6.

Within 2 to 3 weeks after in vivo priming, in vitro responsiveness of primed T cells can usually be measured. This assay is often used as a preparation for subsequent in vitro cloning procedures (UNIT 3.14) and T cell hybridoma preparation (UNIT 3.13).

### Materials

Complete RPMI-10 medium (APPENDIX 2)

Responder cells: Purified T cells isolated from lymph nodes (UNITS 3.1-3.6) of in vivo primed mice

Antigen: 1 mg/ml sterile protein antigen(s) (UNIT 3.13), in PBS or suspension of irradiated or mitomycin C-treated stimulator cells expressing alloantigens at  $8 \times 10^6$  cells/ml (UNIT 3.11, support protocol) in complete RPMI-10 medium (APPENDIX 2)

Accessory cells: suspension of irradiated or mitomycin C-treated (or T cell-depleted) spleen cells syngeneic to the responding T cells at  $5 \times 10^6$  cells/ml in complete RPMI-10 medium

4-ml conical tubes

96-well flat-bottom microtiter plates with lids

1. Follow steps 1 to 3 of the first basic protocol for preparation of responder cells.
2. Prepare 4-fold dilution series of the antigens in 4-ml conical tubes, using complete RPMI-10.

*The following dilutions are recommended: 100, 10, 1, and 0.1  $\mu$ g/ml protein antigens and 8, 4, 2, and  $1 \times 10^6$  cells/ml of stimulator cells in complete medium.*

3. Add antigens to 96-well flat-bottom microtiter plates, at 30  $\mu$ l/well for protein antigens or 100  $\mu$ l/well for cellular antigens. For each experimental group, set up three replicate wells and include control wells with medium only (no antigen).

*By using four concentrations of antigens and three replicate wells for each dose, one row of a microtiter plate will cover the entire tested range.*

4. Add responder T cells in 0.1 ml to each well.

*Purified T cells are recommended; otherwise extremely high background values may be obtained. This appears to be due in part to proliferation of recruited cells (T and non-T) that are not antigen-specific. If unfractionated lymph node cells from recently primed mice are used, add  $1-2 \times 10^5$  cells per well and proceed to step 6.*

5. If purified lymph node T cells specific for protein antigens are used, add 0.1 ml of accessory spleen cells syngeneic to the donor of the responder T cells at  $5 \times 10^5$  cells per well.

*Purified T cells require an exogenous source of accessory non-T cells. Accessory cells function both as antigen-presenting cells and as a source of undefined "second signals." They are not required for cell preparations primed against cellular antigens, because accessory cell function is provided by the stimulator cells.*

6. Proceed as in steps 7 to 9 of the basic protocol.

*Culture periods before labeling can vary widely and kinetic assays should be performed. In general, for T cells from primed mice, it is likely that the response will peak at day 4 or 5.*

## REAGENTS AND SOLUTIONS

### *Percoll solution*

#### *Diluent:*

45 ml 10× PBS, pH 7.4 (APPENDIX 2)

3 ml 0.6 M HCl

132 ml H<sub>2</sub>O

Filter sterilize

#### *70% Percoll solution:*

63 ml Percoll (Pharmacia LKB #170891-01)

37 ml sterile diluent (above)

Final osmolarity should be 310 to 320 osM

## COMMENTARY

### Background Information

Proliferative assays for measuring T cell function have certain advantages and disadvantages compared to the cytotoxic T lymphocyte (CTL) assay described in UNIT 3.11 or the lymphokine production assays in UNITS 3.15 & 6.3. Advantages are that proliferative assays are less time-consuming, less labor-intensive, less cell-consuming, and less expensive than "true" effector T cell function assays. A disadvantage is that antigen specificity is not as easily demonstrated in proliferative assays as in CTL assays, unless antigen-specific clones of proliferating cells are used. Furthermore, the proliferative assay only detects dividing cells instead of measuring true effector T cell function.

It is not clear which T cell function is measured in proliferative assays; the proliferative response should therefore be used solely as general indicators of T cell reactivity. Data obtained in proliferative assays might variously reflect proliferation of CTL, lymphokine-producing T cells, or nonactivated "bystander" cells, and will be severely affected by the function of non-T cells such as accessory cells (see below). Since the majority of T cells respond to and produce IL-2 upon activation, differences in responsiveness in a proliferative assay in part reflect differences in IL-2 production by the responding T cells. Proliferative assays therefore become more meaningful when combined with the lymphokine detection assays presented in UNITS 3.15 & 6.3. Since responsiveness to IL-2 is also determined by the levels and functionality of IL-2 receptors, further information will be added by including measurements of IL-2 receptors (UNIT 6.1) or by flow cytometry (UNIT 5.4). Yet, as a first approximation of cellular activation, proliferative assays are valuable.

### Critical Parameters and Troubleshooting

Parameters affecting the magnitude of T cell proliferative responses include cell concentration, type of medium, source of serum, incubator conditions (CO<sub>2</sub> level and humidity), type and concentration of activating agent, type of responding T cells, type of accessory/ stimulator cells, mouse strain, and culture time. Optimal conditions for individual laboratories and experiments must be derived empirically with respect to these variables, but general guidelines are provided below.

A number of agents can be employed in the first basic protocol to induce T cell proliferation (Table 3.12.1). T cells may be activated by pharmacologic means by producing an elevation of intracellular free calcium with a calcium ionophore combined with activation of protein kinase C with a phorbol ester. The most direct means of inducing T cell activation involves stimulation with monoclonal antibodies that interact with the CD3/TCR complex—i.e., anti-CD3, anti-TCR- $\alpha\beta$  or - $\gamma\delta$ , as well as anti-V $\beta$  antibodies that are capable of interacting with a subset of cells bearing a specific TCR. A vigorous T cell proliferative response of defined subsets can also be induced with certain bacterial toxins known as staphylococcal enterotoxins. These toxins are often referred to as "superantigens" (Marrack and Kappler, 1989) because they stimulate T cells via the variable (V) gene segment of the TCR. Different toxins have affinities for different V $\beta$  chains and these specificities make them valuable reagents for activating T cells. The activating capacity of toxins is also dependent on their ability to bind to MHC class II molecules (i.e., responding T cells react with the toxin/class II complex); thus, responsiveness varies with the

In Vitro Assays  
for Mouse B and  
T Cell Function

3.12.11

mouse strain used. Lectins such as phytohemagglutinin (PHA) and concanavalin A (Con A) have been widely used for many years to activate T cells. Although the precise mechanism of action of these agents is unknown, it is likely that lectins activate T cells by indirectly cross-linking the TCR because TCR-negative cells will not respond to these agents. Lastly, it is also possible to induce T cell activation with monoclonal antibodies to cell-surface antigens other than the TCR; this protocol employs the G7 monoclonal antibody, one of the most effective of the anti-Thy-1 activators (Gunter et al., 1984).

When comparing the reactivity of different cell populations, it is essential to perform dose-response assays for responder T cells and activating agents and for both responder and stimulator T cells (in MLR), since each population may yield optimal responses at different cell numbers. This may reflect differences in frequency of responding cells, and hence may indicate a need to perform limiting dilution assays (UNIT 3.15). Since peak responsiveness of different populations of T cells may occur at different times, it is also essential to perform kinetic experiments—i.e., compare responsiveness at days 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Differences in responsiveness need not necessarily be due to differences in the frequency of responding T cells, but may also indicate differences in the efficacy with which co-stimulatory activity or “second signals” are delivered by the accessory cells present in different cell populations. The type of interactions pertinent to the generation of primary responses by T cells is explained in the commentaries of UNITS 3.8, 3.11, & 3.13. Specific requirements for inducing activation with immobilized antibodies have been described (Staerz and Bevan, 1986; Hathcock et al., 1989; Jenkins et al., 1990). A responding cell population completely devoid of accessory cells (such as purified populations of splenic or lymph node T cells or cloned T cells) will yield fine responsiveness in an MLC, since accessory cell function is provided by the stimulator cells; however, the same population will generally not yield responses when mitogens, antigens, or enterotoxins are used. In such a setting, accessory cells may also function as antigen-presenting cells (APC). Addition of irradiated or mitomycin C-treated syngeneic sources of accessory cells (either whole spleen cells or purified APC; see first support protocol) can be used to restore responsiveness in purified T cells. The need for accessory cells can sometimes be

bypassed when anti-TCR monoclonal antibodies are coupled to plastic, or when certain anti-Thy-1 monoclonal antibodies are used; however, these conditions do not necessarily result in optimal responsiveness (Jenkins et al., 1990).

The level of [ $^3$ H]thymidine incorporation should not be regarded only as a reflection of cellular proliferation: some nondividing cells will synthesize DNA and “cold” thymidine released by disintegrating cells will compete with incorporation of labeled thymidine. Therefore, measurements of DNA synthesis should be accompanied by counting viable cells over the length of the culture period if a true estimate of cellular proliferation is to be obtained. Of course, cell death of nonactivated cells will also interfere with the accuracy of this last parameter.

The sensitivity of proliferation assays is such that small errors in cell numbers will result in large differences in [ $^3$ H]thymidine incorporation values. When values obtained in triplicate cultures correspond poorly (e.g., >5% difference in cpm values >1000), technical problems such as cell clumping, dilution, and pipetting should be considered. Excessively high values may be obtained from contaminated wells, as [ $^3$ H]thymidine will be incorporated into replicating bacteria; therefore, it is good practice to check the wells from microtiter plates under an inverted microscope for contamination. Contamination may also interfere with proliferation of the activated lymphocytes.

It is also useful to check for blast formation by microscopic examination of the cultures: activated lymphocytes will tend to enlarge, and detection of blasts will give a general indication of successful activation.

The main problem that may occur with proliferative response assays is high levels of background [ $^3$ H]thymidine incorporation in control cultures without antigens. This problem is frequently due to the fetal calf serum (FCS) used to supplement the cultures, which may be mitogenic for B cells. Different lots of FCS should be screened to select those that are nonstimulatory or only weakly stimulatory in the absence of other stimuli, and that support strong proliferative responses upon antigenic stimulation of T cells.

If flat-bottom microtiter plates are used in the procedure and weak responses occur, it may be useful to switch to round-bottom plates. Our laboratory has found consistently better responses in round-bottom plates when

thymocytes are used as responder cells or with slight alloantigenic differences between responding and stimulating cells. In addition, antibody-mediated experiments yield better results with round-bottom plates. Presumably, this reflects better cell contact obtained in such plates; optimal responses will almost certainly occur at different cell numbers than in flat-bottom plates and densities will have to be adjusted accordingly.

Although satisfactory responses to most alloantigens can be obtained with complete RPMI-10 medium, it may be necessary to compare different media. This need arises when the proliferative responses are weak (i.e., when [ $^3\text{H}$ ]thymidine values for activated cultures are <10-fold higher than those for control cultures) and may occur under various circumstances: weak alloantigenic differences between responder and stimulator cells, weak T cell proliferative function in the responder cells or diminished APC function in the stimulator cells due to experimental manipulations, or a low precursor frequency of responding T cells. Thymocytes in particular do not contain a high level of responding T cells. Frequently, proliferation can be improved when complete Clicks or Dulbeccos media are used (with additives as described in APPENDIX 2), presumably because these media contain additional nutrients and have an osmolality more compatible with mouse serum than RPMI.

When RPMI is used as medium, 5%  $\text{CO}_2$  will be sufficient, but for other media, a 7.5%  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration in the incubator will be more satisfactory. Generally, the buffering capacity of DMEM is insufficient at 5%, but fine at 7.5%. Much will also depend on the proliferative activity of the responding population of T cells (e.g., vigorous proliferation will reduce the pH in the cultures); it is therefore recommended to compare responsiveness in initial pilot experiments in incubators set at different  $\text{CO}_2$  concentrations.

The culture period required for stimulation—after which the cells are to be labeled—varies for different laboratories, media, and types of responding and stimulator cells. Conditions eliciting weak responses, such as those obtained with thymocytes or a weak alloantigenic difference, will require a longer culture period (5 to 6 days) than those which elicit a higher frequency of responding T cells (3 to 4 days). Because laboratory conditions vary, it will be necessary to run a kinetic assay to determine the optimal time for T cell prolifer-

ation. Addition of [ $^3\text{H}$ ] thymidine on days 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 will provide a useful test; further extension of the culture period will not yield any improvements, due to exhaustion of nutrients in the medium.

### Anticipated Results

For proliferative assays described in the basic protocol, which activate the majority of the responding T cells, responses of 100,000 cpm should be obtained; in the MLR or following activation with monoclonal antibodies to subpopulations of T cells (anti-V $\beta$ ), responses up to 100,000 cpm may be observed; however, measurements of 20,000 cpm (with tight standard errors) can be quite satisfactory. Background values of <1000 cpm should be expected. Reported results (as described in step 9a) should be mean cpm of experimental wells minus background cpm ( $\Delta$  cpm).

### Time Considerations

The time required to set up proliferative assays is not more than a day, with the number of hours depending on the number of different groups of responder cells that must be prepared. The time required for incubation of cells ranges from 2 to 6 days, as noted above in critical parameters. Following an additional 18- to 24-hr incubation period for pulsing, harvesting the cells and measuring cpm will require several hours depending on the number of plates (~15 min for harvesting each plate and ~100 min for counting each plate at 1 min/sample).

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*Both of the above describe how specific proliferation of antigen-primed T cells can be measured.*

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*Details the MLC proliferation assay.*

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*Dendritic cells are allowing scientists to overcome a longstanding obstacle to research in immunology by extending the playing field beyond antigens to immunogens and beyond models to pathogens that cause disease.*

# The Dendritic Cell Advantage: New Focus For Immune-Based Therapies

by Ralph M. Steinman

The focus of immune therapeutics has been on lymphocytes, the cellular mediators of immunity, and the suppression of lymphocyte function. The drug ciclosporin (cyclosporine) is an excellent and successful example. However, medicine needs therapies that enhance immunity or resistance to infections and tumors. Medicine also needs strategies, whether suppressive or enhancing, that are specific to the disease-causing stimulus or antigen. In contrast to lymphocytes, dendritic cells (DCs) provide a much earlier and antigen-specific means for manipulating the immune response. DCs capture antigens and then initiate and control the activities of lymphocytes, including the development of resistance to infections and tumors (reviewed in references 1-3).

## Summary

Dendritic cells (DCs) provide a much earlier and antigen-specific means for manipulating the immune response. The best-studied function of DCs is to convert antigens into immunogens for T cells. The "DC advantage" entails a myriad of functions. DCs are more than antigen-presenting cells; they are accessories or adjuvants or catalysts for triggering and controlling immunity. Another special feature of DCs is their location and movement in the body; DCs are stationed at surfaces where antigens gain access to the body. The events that make up the life history of DCs are now being unraveled in molecular terms. As research on DCs expands, more potential functions and more sites for their manipulation are becoming apparent. © 2000 Prous Science. All rights reserved.

The controlling role of DCs is best known for thymus-dependent lymphocytes or T cells which are important in many diseases, the most poignant being the AIDS epidemic (Table 1). DCs were identified in a few laboratories that were focusing on the induction of immunity from resting T cells. It was noted that immune tissues (spleen, lymph nodes, lymph. blood) had a small fraction of cells with unusual

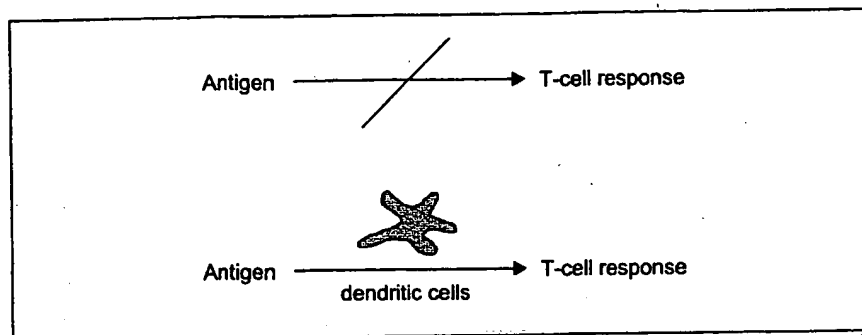
"tree-like" or "dendritic" processes. These distinctive cells had not been recognized previously and they proved to have distinct functions. Most importantly, DCs were potent inducers of immunity even in animals, not just the test tube, and now even in patients (reviewed in references 1-3).

The DC field was held back by the fact that there were so few cells relative



**TABLE I: HUMAN DISEASES THAT INVOLVE T CELLS**

- Rejection of organ transplants and graft-vs.-host disease in bone marrow transplantation
- Resistance to many infections including vaccine design
- Vaccines against tumors and immune therapies for existing tumors
- Allergy
- AIDS
- Autoimmune diseases like insulin-dependent (juvenile) diabetes, multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis and psoriasis



**Fig. 1.** A key function of dendritic cells. Antigens within tumors, transplants and infectious agents need to be presented by DCs to become immunogens, i.e., to make T cells begin to grow and exhibit their helper and killer functions.

to other players in the immune system such as B cells, T cells and macrophages. In reality, DCs are quite abundant for the job they have to do, namely, to initiate immune responses from antigen-specific T cells. In immune system organs like lymph nodes, DCs form an extensive network throughout the T cell-rich regions and physically outnumber any given antigen-reactive T cell by at least 100 to 1. The DC field was also held back because many thought that the cells were no different from macrophages, thus keeping investigators from working on the active DCs. In reality, DCs were identified on the basis of profound differences from macrophages, and their many distinct properties and functions were only uncovered by separating DCs from macrophages.

The best-studied function of DCs is to convert antigens into immunogens for T cells. The antigen receptors on T cells do not focus on intact proteins in microbes and tumors, but instead recognize fragmented or processed proteins, that is, peptides. The processing of protein antigens into peptides occurs within cells, and then the peptides are

displayed or presented at the cell surface affixed to products of the major histocompatibility complex (MHC). The ensuing interaction between a T-cell receptor (TCR) and its specific MHC-peptide complex allows a T cell to detect peptides formed within cells in transplants, tumors, sites of infection and self tissues attacked during autoimmune disease (Table I). "Antigens" refers to specific substances recognized by the immune system, while "immunogens" refers to antigens that effectively induce responses either by themselves or together with enhancing materials called "adjuvants." For T cells in particular, antigens and immunogens are not one and the same (Fig. 1). Even preprocessed peptides and MHC-peptide complexes are weak immunogens. This was evident early on in the work of Peter Medawar, the great scientist who discovered the immune basis of transplantation. He spent many years trying to purify functioning transplantation antigens. These efforts were to little avail.

What was not known in Medawar's time is that transplantation antigens

(later shown to be MHC-peptide complexes) become immunogenic when presented by DCs.<sup>4</sup> In other words, transplantation antigens when presented on many cell types are weak immunogens, but on DCs they become powerful inducers of immunity.<sup>4</sup> The same is true of peptides that become much more immunogenic when presented on DCs. DCs activate T cells by getting them to divide and express their helper and killer functions. Then the activated T cells interact with other antigen-presenting cells to eliminate the antigen in question. DCs are also called "nature's adjuvant," because prior adjuvants were artificial substances used to enhance immunity. The DC advantage entails a myriad of functions, some of which will be considered below.

### Potency of dendritic cells in initiating immunity in tissue culture

What are some specific features of DCs that warrant attention? The first is their potency. Very small numbers of DCs are sufficient to trigger strong T-cell responses in test tubes. Immune assays are generally carried out with impure antigen-presenting cells, applied at a dose of one presenting cell for every T cell, the latter often preactivated. In contrast, roughly one DC per 30–100 T cells is more than sufficient to induce optimal responses, including responses by resting T cells. A single DC can simultaneously activate 10–20 T cells nestled within its sheet-like processes. Therefore, DCs are more than antigen-presenting cells; they are accessories or adjuvants or catalysts for triggering and controlling immunity.

It has always been clear that the accessory function of DCs did not depend exclusively on their capacity to process antigens to form MHC-peptide complexes. This is because the stimuli that were used to define the potency and immune-activating role of DCs did not require that the DCs process an applied antigen. Such stimuli included major transplantation antigens, mitogens, contact allergens, anti-

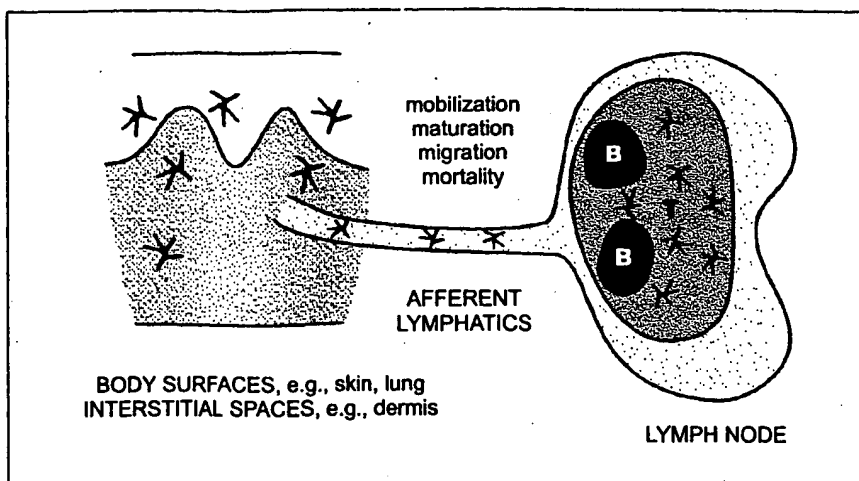
T-cell antibodies and superantigens. Furthermore, once resting T cells were activated by DCs, the T cells responded vigorously to antigens presented by other cell types, showing that the latter were not deficient in forming ligands for the antigen receptor on T cells, but instead lacked accessory properties.

The word "accessory" has since been replaced by the terms "professional" and "co-stimulatory," but the basic concept is unchanged by shifting terminology. T cells need stimuli other than their specific trigger or ligand (MHC-peptide complexes) to begin to grow and function, for example, to produce the interleukins and killer molecules mentioned above. DCs are potent in providing the needed accessory or co-stimulatory functions. For example, DCs produce an adhesion molecule called DC-SIGN that binds to a target on resting T cells called ICAM-3,<sup>5</sup> and DCs express very high levels of a stimulatory molecule called CD86 that binds to CD28 on resting T cells.<sup>6</sup> These are but two examples of the specialized activities of DCs. These cells do not operate as a single magic bullet.

### Position of dendritic cells *in vivo*

Another special feature of DCs is their location and movement in the body. As criteria were developed to identify DCs, it became feasible to go back into the animal and patient to look for the corresponding cells in different tissues. DCs are stationed at surfaces where antigens gain access to the body (Fig. 2, left). The skin and the airway have been the best studied. DCs are found in afferent lymphatic vessels, special channels that allow cells to move from peripheral tissues to lymphoid organs, primarily the T-cell areas (Fig. 2, middle and right). This migration is most readily observed in models of skin transplantation and contact allergy, which are the two most powerful immune responses known.

DC migration is likely to be very important. The body's pool of T cells primarily traffics through the T-cell areas of lymph nodes, rather than



**Fig. 2.** Distribution of dendritic cells *in situ*. DCs at body surfaces and in solid organs can pick up antigens, move to the lymphoid tissues to find antigen-specific T cells and initiate immunity. Molecular mechanisms are being uncovered that govern the mobilization, maturation, migration and mortality of these DCs. In the lymph node, T lymphocytes are selected for expansion and differentiation into helper and killer T cells. The activated T cells then leave the lymph node to return to the body surface or peripheral organ to eliminate the antigen.

through tissues where antigens are usually deposited. So when DCs capture antigens in the skin, airway or another peripheral tissue, their migration to the T-cell areas gives them a chance to select the corresponding rare specific T cells from the assembled repertoire (Fig. 2). The selected T cells then increase in numbers (clonal expansion) and function, enabling the specific immune response to begin. The initial frequency of T cells that recognize an antigen is very small. Only one in 10,000–100,000 of T cells in the repertoire responds to a specific MHC-peptide complex. Therefore, it is so precise and efficient for DCs to be able to pick up an antigen in the periphery and then initiate the immune response from rare T-cell clones in lymphoid organs.

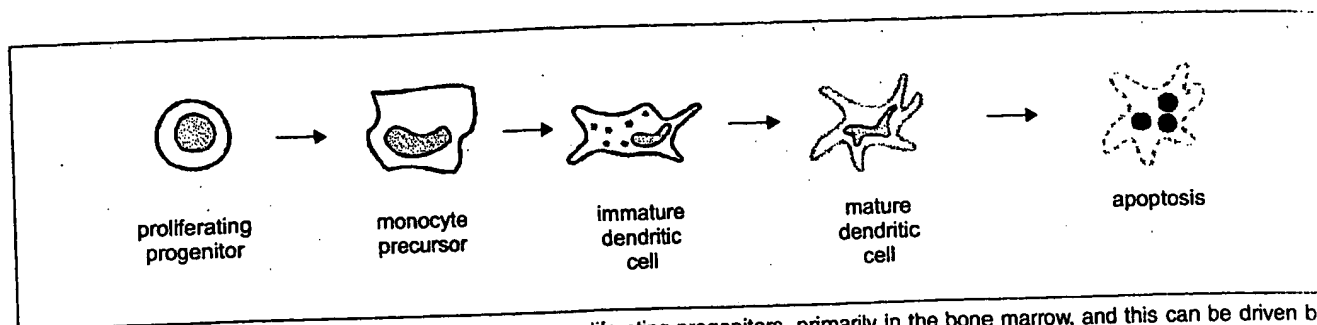
The events that make up the life history of DCs (Figs. 2 and 3) are now being unraveled in molecular terms. For example, scientists are figuring out how to expand antigen-capturing precursors to DCs using Il13 ligand and granulocyte colony-stimulating factor (G-CSF). Key players for the mobilization of DCs from the periphery to lymph nodes are the multidrug resistance receptors, usually studied for their capacity to mediate resistance to chemotherapeutic agents rather than

movement of DCs. Migration of DCs is controlled by chemokines produced in the lymphatic vessels and lymphoid organs (Fig. 2). These act on DC chemokine receptors to orchestrate their movement to the T-cell areas. Then within the lymphoid tissue, several members of the tumor necrosis factor (TNF) and TNF-receptor families, such as TRANCE and CD40 ligand, trigger DC production of cytokines like interleukin-12. The TNF family also maintains DC viability. Otherwise the cells die within a day or two. Each of these components of DC function provides targets for manipulating immunity.

### Priming of T-cell immunity via dendritic cells

#### Animal studies

During the early research on DCs, several labs administered antigens to experimental animals and then tried to identify the cells that had captured the antigens in a form that was immunogenic. Regardless of the route of antigen administration (blood, muscle, skin, intestine and airway), DCs were the major reservoir of immunogen.



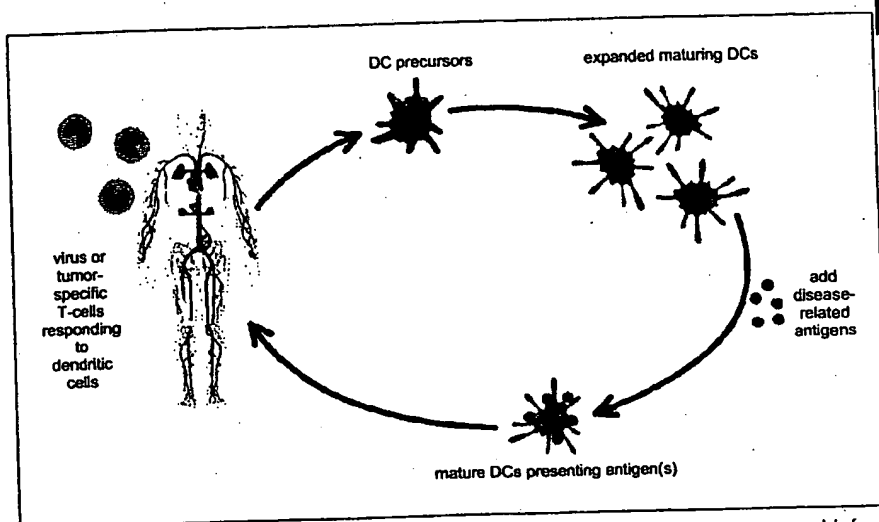
**Fig. 3.** The life history of dendritic cells. DCs arise from proliferating progenitors, primarily in the bone marrow, and this can be driven by cytokines like flt-3 ligand and G-CSF. Precursors are formed, such as the monocytes in blood, which then give rise to immature DCs. The immature DCs are capable of producing large amounts of antigen-presenting MHC products and capturing antigens. Multidrug resistance receptors are newly recognized players in the mobilization of immature DCs. DCs mature in response to various stimuli such as infection and inflammation, and migrate under the influence of chemokines to the lymphoid tissues. There the DCs die within a day unless their lifespan is prolonged by TNF-family molecules expressed by the activated T cells.

Next, DCs were used as nature's adjuvant to immunize animals. The DCs were taken from mice or rats, exposed to antigens *ex vivo* and injected back into immunologically naive recipients. The animals became immunized to the antigens that had been captured by the DCs, and the immunization took place in the lymph nodes draining the site of DC injection. Genetic proof was provided that the DCs were priming the animal directly and not simply handing off their antigen to other cells.<sup>7,8</sup>

DC-based immunization is really very different from all prior attempts at cell therapy. Immunology has had extensive experience with "passive immunization," whereby a recipient is given large numbers of cells that are activated prior to injection. It is hard to produce such large numbers of cells, and their lifespan, diversity and efficacy are all finite. In contrast, when relatively small numbers of antigen-charged DCs are used to induce immunity, this produces "active immunization." Now the animals (and patients, see below) can make their own diverse and longer lasting immune response to the antigen-bearing DCs.

### Human studies

The above experiments made it clear that DCs, pulsed *ex vivo* with antigens, actively immunized animals and raised the exciting possibility that scientists would be able to induce resis-



**Fig. 4.** The use of dendritic cells as adjuvants for enhancing immunity to tumors and infectious agents in humans. This new form of immune therapy begins with the isolation of DC precursors from the patient, usually from blood. The precursors develop *ex vivo* (in relatively simple tissue culture systems) into large numbers of more mature DCs. During this time, the DCs are charged with antigens from the tumor or infection. Then the DCs are reinfused to elicit immunity and thereby resistance to the disease.

tance to tumors, infections and transplants in patients. For example, could one expose patients' DCs *ex vivo* to antigens in their tumors and then reinfuse the antigen-bearing DCs to elicit tumor-specific immunity (Fig. 4)? This approach is actually not terribly complicated, but one first had to overcome a major obstacle and learn to generate large numbers of DCs. These techniques became available in the 1990s. They have energized the field and, accordingly, clinical trials for the immunization of humans against cancer have begun on most continents.

It is evident that DCs can serve as adjuvants for humans, converting antigens into immunogens.<sup>9,10</sup> Even in advanced cancer, immune responses already have been observed that are similar to or better than immune responses obtained with other approaches. However, this approach is still in its preliminary stages, since a good deal of science remains to be developed. On the one hand, there are critical unknowns in terms of overall DC biology. Many of the clinical studies to date, for example, have overlooked key features that could improve DC function, such as the need for DCs

to be sufficiently mature (see below) to be effective *in vivo*. Also, DC biology has to be placed in the context of specific tumors and pathogens and patients for DC-based therapies to be optimized.

To summarize and further illustrate the role of DCs in the context of human disease (Table I), consider the need to harness T cells to resist tumors and chronic infections. Protein antigens often are known for a tumor-like melanoma, or for a virus like HIV-1 whose genetic sequence has been available for more than 15 years. However, this knowledge about antigens from melanoma and HIV-1 antigens remains to be converted into methods that provide better immunogens either for immune therapy of melanoma or for the design of HIV-1 vaccines. This is because some important facts of immunological life are being overlooked. When antigens are injected, they also need to gain access to the right DCs to become immunogens (Fig. 1).

### Delivering antigens to dendritic cells

Broadly speaking, a central goal is to learn how to deliver or "target" antigens to DCs and simultaneously to differentiate or "mature" the cells to their most potent state. These two challenges, antigen targeting and DC maturation, prove to be intertwined.

Targeting means that the antigen should be in a form that the DCs can recognize. Without such recognition, the uptake and subsequent processing of antigen to form MHC-peptide complexes is suboptimal. DCs have a number of special mechanisms for capturing antigens and converting these into MHC-peptide complexes (Table II). For example, DCs have a receptor called DEC-205 whose binding partners or ligands are still unknown. Nonetheless, it is clear that DEC-205 greatly increases the capacity of DCs to form MHC-peptide complexes.<sup>11</sup> DCs also carry out a fascinating process called "cross-presentation." DCs can take up dying cells and effi-

- | TABLE II: DENDRITIC CELL SPECIALIZATION TO INCREASE MHC-PEPTIDE COMPLEX FORMATION |   |
|---|---|
| •   | Receptors for antigen uptake, e.g., DEC-205   |
| •   | Processing of dying cells, nonreplicating microbes and immune complexes onto MHC class I ("cross-presentation") |
| •   | Regulation of antigen processing by maturation stimuli  |
| •   | Clustering of T-cell receptor ligands with co-stimulators like CD86   |

ciently extract peptides from them, so antigens "cross" from the dying cell to the DC. The discoverers of this phenomenon called it "resurrecting the dead."<sup>12</sup> Cross-presentation allows DCs to efficiently form MHC-peptide complexes from dead cells in tumors, transplants and tissues under autoimmune attack.

Special uptake and processing mechanisms allow DCs to tailor a protein antigen, as well as the proteins in a complex microbe or tumor cell, into peptides that bind to an individual's MHC products. The latter are exceptionally polymorphic, differing genetically from one individual to another. As a result, the relevant immunizing peptides differ from one individual to another. One reason why peptides are not ideal immunogens is that they must be individualized. DCs, in contrast, can capture antigens with high efficiency and likewise extract peptides that are relevant for any individual.

A second DC advantage is that these cells have the many required accessory or co-stimulatory properties for converting the selected peptides ("antigens") into effective immunogens. A third DC advantage is that these cells position themselves in a way that leads to the identification of rare antigen-reactive T lymphocytes *in vivo* (Fig. 2). DCs thus overcome many of the difficult obstacles in initiating immunity.

In order for an antigen to be a strong immunogen, one needs to provide a stimulus for the final differentiation or maturation of the DCs (Fig. 3). Most DCs in the body are in an immature state and lack many features that lead to a strong T-cell response.

Immature DCs, for example, lack the CD86 and CD40 molecules that greatly boost the DC-T cell interaction. Immature DCs also lack a chemokine receptor called CCR7 that seems very important for proper migration and homing to lymph nodes to start immunity. For cancer immunology, it is unlikely that tumors provide maturation stimuli. Tumors may even block DC maturation induced by other stimuli. Therefore it is important to learn how to deliver tumor cells to DCs and bypass the normal obstacles to effective antitumor immunity.

Surprising recent evidence actually links DC maturation to the efficient formation of MHC-peptide complexes or TCR ligands (Table II). Immature DCs take up antigens, but they do not make abundant MHC-peptide complexes until they receive a maturation stimulus.<sup>13,14</sup> Maturation also up-regulates CD86 co-stimulators, but the CD86 actually travels together with the TCR ligands to the surface of the DCs. At the DC surface, the MHC molecules and CD86 remain clustered with each other, keeping the machinery for T-cell activation juxtaposed. This phenomenon will help explain the potency of DCs, because TCR ligands and co-stimulators are displayed together on the cell surface and in high levels.

### Control points beyond antigen targeting and maturation of DCs

Research on DCs is moving more vigorously, because the cells are more readily available and because their role in the immune system is considered essential. Nonetheless, researchers in this field are just beginning to find ways to manipulate DCs *in situ*. Putting together an antigen that targets

to DCs with a stimulus for DC maturation will be a major step in improving the conversion of antigens into immunogens, as in immune-based therapies against tumors and infectious agents.

Additional challenges and questions are evident:

- How can DC numbers be increased *in situ* and how can active DCs be mobilized to a cancer or site of chronic infection?
- Can DCs induce strong immune memory to make vaccination long lasting and effective (we have only been reviewing the role of DCs in the initiation of immunity)?
- Can DCs change the quality of the immune response? "Quality" refers to recent evidence for different types of DCs, especially a subset that induces Th1-type T cells for resistance to infectious agents and strong memory.
- Is it possible to move beyond DC-based immunization experiments and use DCs to either regulate or tolerize the immune system, as frequently required in transplantation and autoimmune diseases?
- Can DCs influence elements of the immune system other than T cells; for example, B cells and the innate defenses provided by natural killer (NK) and NK-T cells?

The answer to all these questions is a preliminary "yes." As research on DCs expands, more potential functions and more sites for their manipulation are becoming apparent.

### Dendritic cells and better control of disease

DCs provide important avenues for the investigation of human disease. Many labs are exploiting DCs to identify antigens relevant for immunity against human pathogens. In these experiments, one introduces complex but clinically important antigens to DCs and then identifies which components are best presented to the immune system. We have recently used this approach to identify previously un-

known immune responses to the Epstein-Barr virus,<sup>15</sup> a virus we all carry that has the potential to cause cancer like Hodgkin's lymphoma. Other laboratories have been using DCs to identify new antigens in other infectious agents, in transplants and in cancers like melanoma.

Investigators are also manipulating DCs *ex vivo* and then reinfusing the cells to identify conditions leading to strong immunity in patients (Fig. 4). In particular, DC-mediated active immunization against cancer is being vigorously pursued, as mentioned above. Instead of manipulating DCs *ex vivo*, a more desirable goal would be able to alter DCs directly *in situ*. Some approaches are under way. An example is the injection of cytokines like flt3 ligand and G-CSF to mobilize various precursor populations of DCs. One should also develop methods to control DC mobilization, migration and maturation. In sum, DCs are allowing scientists to overcome a longstanding obstacle to research in immunology by extending the playing field beyond antigens to immunogens and beyond models to pathogens that cause disease.

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## Coexpression of two distinct genes is required to generate secreted bioactive cytotoxic lymphocyte maturation factor

(heterodimeric lymphokine/T-cell growth factor/lymphokine-activated killer cells/coordinate gene regulation/interleukin-12)

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**ABSTRACT** Cytotoxic lymphocyte maturation factor (CLMF) is a disulfide-bonded heterodimeric lymphokine that (i) acts as a growth factor for activated T cells independent of interleukin 2 and (ii) synergizes with suboptimal concentrations of interleukin 2 to induce lymphokine-activated killer cells. We now report the cloning and expression of both human CLMF subunit cDNAs from a lymphoblastoid B-cell line, NC-37. The two subunits represent two distinct and unrelated gene products whose mRNAs are coordinately induced upon activation of NC-37 cells. Coexpression of the two subunit cDNAs in COS cells is necessary for the secretion of biologically active CLMF; COS cells transfected with either subunit cDNA alone do not secrete bioactive CLMF. Recombinant CLMF expressed in mammalian cells displays biologic activities essentially identical to natural CLMF, and its activities can be neutralized by monoclonal antibodies prepared against natural CLMF. Since this heterodimeric protein displays the properties of an interleukin, we propose that CLMF be given the designation interleukin 12.

The molecular cloning and expression of recombinant cytokines has made possible both significant advances in our understanding of the molecular basis of immune responses and the development of new approaches to the treatment of disease states. As an example, recombinant interleukin 2 (recombinant IL-2) has been shown to be capable of causing regression of established tumors in both experimental animals (1) and in man (2); however, its clinical use has been associated with significant toxicity (2). One potential approach to improving the therapeutic utility of recombinant cytokines is to use them in combination (3, 4). With this concept in mind, we initiated a search for novel cytokines that would synergize with suboptimal concentrations of recombinant IL-2 to activate cytotoxic lymphocytes *in vitro* and thus might have synergistic immunoenhancing effects when administered together with recombinant IL-2 *in vivo*. This led to the identification of a factor, designated cytotoxic lymphocyte maturation factor (CLMF), that synergized with recombinant IL-2 to facilitate the generation of both cytolytic T lymphocytes (CTLs) and lymphokine-activated killer (LAK) cells *in vitro* (5, 6). CLMF was subsequently purified to homogeneity from a human lymphoblastoid B-cell line (NC-37) and was shown to be a 75-kDa disulfide-bonded heterodimer composed of two subunits with molecular masses of 40 kDa and 35 kDa (7).<sup>†</sup> We now report the molecular cloning and expression of CLMF.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**cDNA Cloning.** A subline of NC-37 cells selected for its ability to produce high levels of CLMF (7), NC-37.98, was induced with phorbol 12-myristate 13-acetate (PMA) and calcium ionophore A23187 for 16 hr. Poly(A)<sup>+</sup> RNA was isolated, and random hexamer-primed cDNA libraries were established in phage  $\lambda$ gt10 by standard procedures. Mixed-primer polymerase chain reaction (PCR) using controlled ramp times (8) was performed as follows. PCR primers contained all possible codons and were 14 or 15 nucleotides long (Fig. 1) with a 5' extension of 9 nucleotides containing an *Eco*RI site for subcloning. Degeneracies varied from 1 in 32 to 1 in 4096; 0.5–4 pmol per permutation of forward and reverse primer was used in a 50- to 100- $\mu$ l PCR mixture with 40 ng of cDNA made from NC-37.98 cells that had been activated by culture with 10 ng of PMA and 25 ng of calcium ionophore A23187 per ml for 16 hr (40-kDa subunit) or with 3  $\mu$ g of human genomic DNA (35-kDa subunit). PCR cycling parameters were as follows. Initial denaturation was at 95°C for 7 min. Low-stringency annealing was performed by cooling to 37°C over 2 min, incubating 2 min at 37°C, heating to 72°C over 2.5 min, extending at 72°C for 1.5 min, heating to 95°C over 1 min, and denaturing at 95°C for 1 min. This cycle was repeated once. Thirty standard cycles (40-kDa subunit) or 40 standard cycles (35-kDa subunit) were performed as follows: 95°C for 1 min, 55°C for 2 min, and 72°C for 2 min. Final extension was at 72°C for 10 min. "Amplicons" of the expected size were gel-purified, subcloned, and sequenced. The 40-kDa subunit cDNAs were isolated by hybridizing the 54-mer amplicon in 5 $\times$  SSC (1 $\times$  SSC = 0.15 M NaCl/0.015 M sodium citrate, pH 7) containing 20% formamide at 37°C overnight. Filters were washed in 2 $\times$  SSC at 42°C for 30 min and exposed to x-ray film. The 35-kDa subunit cDNAs were isolated by hybridizing the 51-mer amplicon in 5 $\times$  SSC/20% formamide at 37°C overnight. The filters were washed in 2 $\times$  SSC at 40°C for 30 min and exposed to x-ray film. Positive clones were plaque-purified, their inserts were subcloned into the pBluescript plasmid, and their sequences were determined by using Sequenase.

**Expression.** cDNAs were separately engineered for expression in vectors containing the simian virus 40 early promoter essentially as described (9). COS cells were transfected with both CLMF subunit expression plasmids mixed together or

Abbreviations: CLMF, cytotoxic lymphocyte maturation factor; rCLMF and nCLMF, recombinant and natural CLMFs; CTL, cytolytic T lymphocyte; IL, interleukin; LAK, lymphokine-activated killer; PHA, phytohemagglutinin; PMA, phorbol 12-myristate 13-acetate; n, natural; PCR, polymerase chain reaction.

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<sup>‡</sup>The cDNA sequences reported in this paper have been deposited in the Genbank data base [accession nos. M38443 (35-kDa CLMF subunit) and M38444 (40-kDa CLMF subunit)].

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1  MCPARSLLLV ATLVLDDHLS LARNLPVATP DPGMFPC^LHH SQNLLRAVSN
51  MLQKARQ^TLF FYPCT^SEEID HEDITKDKTS TVEAC^LPLEL TKNESCLNSR
101  ETSFITNGSC LASRKTSFMM ALCLSS^IYED LKMYQVEFKT MNAKLLMDPK
151  RQIFLDQ^NML AVIDELMQAL NFNSETVPQK SSLEEDFYK TKIKLCILLH
201  AFRIRAVTID RVTSYLNAS

1  MCHQQLVISW FSLVFLASPL VAIWELKKDV YVVELDWYPD APGEMVVLTC
51  DTPEEDGITW TLDQSSEVLG SGKTLTIQVK EFGDAGQYTC HKGGEVLSHS
101  LLLLHKKEDG IWSTDILKDQ KEPKNKTF^LR CEAKNYSGRF TCWLLTTIST
151  DLTFSVKSSR GSSDPQGVTC GAATLSAERV RGDNKEYEYS VECQEDSACP
201  AAEE^SLPIEV MVDVHKLKY ENYTS^SFIR DIIKPDPPKN LQLKPLKNSR
251  QVEVSWEYPD TWSTPHSYFS LTFCVQVQ^GK SKREKKDRVF TDKTSATVIC
301  RKNASISVRA QDRYSSSSWS EWASVPCS

```

FIG. 1. Amino acid sequences of the 35-kDa (Upper) and 40-kDa (Lower) CLMF subunits as deduced from the respective cDNAs and shown in single-letter code. Signal peptides are overlined, cysteine residues are marked by a caret, and N-linked glycosylation sites (NXS, NXT, where X is another amino acid) are underlined. The peptide sequences used to generate PCR probes are overlined with arrows indicating the direction of amplification.

with each one separately by the DEAE-dextran method. Twenty-four hours after transfection, the serum-containing medium was replaced with medium containing 1% Nutridoma-SP (Boehringer Mannheim), and supernatant fluids were collected from the cultures after 40 hr. These fluids were stored at 4°C until tested in the bioassays.

**General Methods.** Standard molecular biological procedures were used as described (10). CLMF bioassays were performed as detailed (7).

**Computer Searches.** The National Biomedical Research Foundation protein data base (Release 26.0) as well as the Genbank and European Molecular Biology Laboratory databases (Releases 65.0 and 24.0, respectively) were searched for sequences homologous to CLMF cDNAs. The two subunit sequences were compared to each other using the ALIGN program (mutation data matrix, break penalty of 6; see ref. 11).

## RESULTS

Partial N-terminal amino acid sequences of the two CLMF subunits (7) were used to generate completely defined 51- to 54-base-pair (bp)-long oligonucleotide probes by means of mixed primer PCR. These probes were used to screen cDNA libraries made from RNA from activated NC-37.98 cells, and cDNAs encoding the two subunits were isolated and characterized. Both cDNAs encode secreted proteins with a classical hydrophobic N-terminal signal peptide immediately followed by the N terminus of the mature protein as determined by protein sequencing (7). Two independent cDNA clones for the 40-kDa subunit were shown to be identical. Both encode the mature 40-kDa subunit that is composed of 306 amino acids (calculated  $M_r = 34,699$ ) and contains 10 cysteine residues and four potential N-linked glycosylation sites (Fig. 1). Two of these sites are within isolated tryptic peptides derived from the purified 40-kDa CLMF subunit protein. Amino acid sequence analysis has shown that Asn-

222 is glycosylated, whereas Asn-125 is not (Fig. 1; F. Podlaski, personal communication). The mature 35-kDa subunit is composed of 197 amino acids (calculated  $M_r = 22,513$ ), with 7 cysteine residues and three potential N-linked glycosylation sites (Fig. 1). When purified CLMF is reduced with 2-mercaptoethanol and analyzed by SDS/PAGE, the 35-kDa subunit appears to be heterogeneous, suggesting that it may be heavily glycosylated (7). Two variants of 35-kDa subunit-encoding cDNAs were isolated. The first type had the sequence shown in Fig. 1. Additional isolates contained what is probably an allelic variation, replacing Thr-213 with a methionine residue.

Computer searches of sequence databases showed that the amino acid sequences of the two subunits are not related to any known protein. The subunit sequences are also not related to each other, since a comparison using the ALIGN program (11) gave a score of 1.27; only scores  $>3$  are considered to indicate significant evolutionary relationship (12). The genes encoding the subunits appear to be unique, since low- and high-stringency hybridizations of genomic blots revealed identical banding patterns (data not shown). RNA blots showed the size of the 40-kDa subunit mRNA to be 2.4 kb, whereas the 35-kDa subunit was encoded by a 1.4-kb transcript (Fig. 2). Expression of the two mRNAs encoding the subunits was coordinately regulated upon induction (Fig. 2). When NC-37.98 cells were activated with PMA and calcium ionophore for 72 hr, mRNA encoding each of the CLMF subunits was minimally detectable at 6 hr after the beginning of induction but was readily detected at 24 hr and continued to accumulate until maximal levels were reached at 72 hr (normalized to GAPDH mRNA levels; see the legend to Fig. 2). In contrast, the mRNA for IL-2 in activated NC-37.98 cells was already at high levels at 6 hr and subsequently decreased, whereas the mRNAs for the low-affinity IL-2 receptor (p55) followed the induction pattern seen for the CLMF subunits. Scanning of RNA blots also revealed that steady-state mRNA levels for the 40-kDa

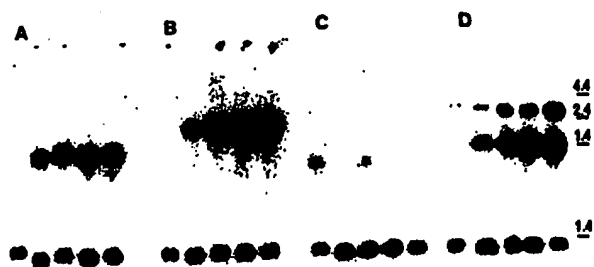


FIG. 2. RNA blots showing the coordinate induction of the 35-kDa (A) and 40-kDa (B) CLMF subunit mRNAs and IL-2 mRNA (C) and its p55 receptor mRNA (D). Poly(A)<sup>+</sup> RNA (5  $\mu$ g) from NC-37.98 cells activated with 10 ng of PMA and 25 ng of calcium ionophore A23187 per ml were loaded in each lane. Lanes from left to right in each panel show RNAs isolated 6, 24, 30, 48, and 72 hr after induction, respectively. (Upper) Four-day exposures. (Lower) Two-hour exposure of the same blots after stripping and rehybridization with a GAPDH probe. Marker sizes are in kb (BRL RNA ladder).

CLMF subunit were severalfold higher than those for the 35-kDa subunit expressed by the same cells. This finding parallels the observation that activated NC-37 cells secrete excess free 40-kDa subunit protein (7). The 3' untranslated sequences of both CLMF subunit mRNAs contain several copies of the octamer motif TTATTTAT (data not shown). This sequence is present in other transiently expressed mRNAs and is involved in regulating mRNA stability (13).

Coexpression of the 40-kDa and 35-kDa CLMF subunit cDNAs in COS cells was required to generate secreted biologically active CLMF (Table 1 and Fig. 3). COS cells transfected with cDNA encoding either the 40-kDa subunit alone or the 35-kDa subunit alone did not secrete biologically active CLMF (Table 1). Mixing media conditioned by COS

cells that had been separately transfected with one or the other of the two CLMF subunit cDNAs also did not give rise to bioactive CLMF (Table 1).

Two types of assays were used to compare rCLMF and nCLMF. The first assay measures the proliferation of phytohemagglutinin (PHA)-activated human peripheral blood lymphocytes, whereas the second assay evaluates the synergy between CLMF and suboptimal concentrations of IL-2 in the generation of LAK cells in hydrocortisone-containing cultures (7). The data in Fig. 3 show that rCLMF as expressed in COS cells and nCLMF as purified from NC-37 cells are essentially identical. Dose-response curves for rCLMF and nCLMF were superimposable in each of the two assays, and rCLMF was neutralized by a monoclonal antibody raised against nCLMF. Conditioned media from cultures of mock-transfected COS cells displayed no activity in these assays (Table 1 and data not shown).

## DISCUSSION

In a previous report (7), we described the purification of a heterodimeric cytokine, CLMF, that synergized with low amounts of IL-2 to cause the generation of LAK cells in the presence of hydrocortisone and stimulated the proliferation of activated T cells independent of IL-2. In the present report, we have used the N-terminal amino acid sequence information previously obtained to clone the two subunit cDNAs of CLMF. Protein purification of NC-37 cell line-derived CLMF had shown that the protein was composed of two disulfide-bonded subunits with different N-terminal amino acid sequences (7). However, it was not clear from our previous results whether the two subunits were processed from one common gene product and whether proteolytic posttranslational processing other than signal peptide cleavage was occurring. The molecular cloning and sequencing of

Table 1. Coexpression of both CLMF subunit cDNAs is required for secretion of biologically active CLMF by COS cells

Addition	Conc., units/ml	Dilution	[ <sup>3</sup> H]Thymidine incorporated by PHA-activated lymphoblasts, mean cpm $\pm$ 1 SEM
Cytokine*			
None	—		11,744 $\pm$ 514
nCLMF	200		68,848 $\pm$ 878
nCLMF	40		48,827 $\pm$ 605
nCLMF	8		26,828 $\pm$ 594
nCLMF	1.6		17,941 $\pm$ 196
Culture fluid from COS cells transfected with			
A. 35-kDa CLMF subunit cDNA		1:20	11,912 $\pm$ 660
		1:100	10,876 $\pm$ 232
B. 40-kDa CLMF subunit cDNA		1:20	11,699 $\pm$ 931
		1:100	11,666 $\pm$ 469
C. 35-kDa + 40-kDa CLMF subunit cDNAs		1:20	58,615 $\pm$ 587
		1:100	38,361 $\pm$ 828
1:1 mix of culture fluids A and B		1:10†	11,544 $\pm$ 483
		1:50	10,503 $\pm$ 259
CM from mock-transfected control‡		1:20	11,503 $\pm$ 286
		1:100	10,751 $\pm$ 303

PHA-activated lymphoblasts were prepared from human peripheral blood mononuclear cells as described (7). Lymphoblast proliferation was measured in a 48-hr assay (7) in which  $2 \times 10^4$  lymphoblasts were incubated in 100- $\mu$ l cultures containing the indicated amounts of natural CLMF (nCLMF) or COS cell culture fluids. [<sup>3</sup>H]Thymidine was added to each culture 18 hr prior to harvest. Conc., concentration.

\*nCLMF is purified NC-37-derived CLMF.

†1:10 dilution of the 1:1 mixture of culture fluids A and B was equivalent to a 1:20 final dilution of each of the individual culture fluids.

‡Conditioned medium (CM) from cultures of mock transfected COS cells.



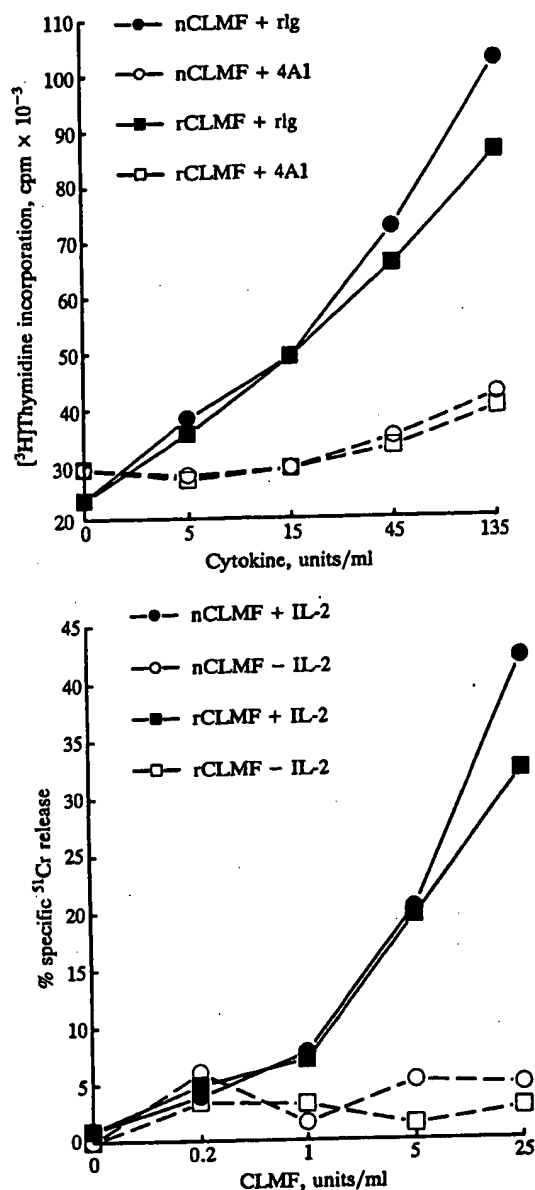


FIG. 3. Comparison of biologic activities of nCLMF (circles) and recombinant CLMF (rCLMF, squares). nCLMF was purified from NC-37 cell-conditioned media; rCLMF was purified from conditioned media from cultures of COS cells transfected with cDNAs encoding the 40-kDa and 35-kDa human CLMF subunits. (Upper) T-cell growth factor assay. The ability of CLMF to stimulate the proliferation of human PHA-activated lymphoblasts in 48-hr cultures was assayed as described (7). CLMF preparations were mixed with neutralizing rat monoclonal anti-human CLMF antibody 4A1 (ref. 7; open symbols) or with normal rat IgG (Sigma; rlg, closed symbols) at a final concentration of 20  $\mu$ g of IgG/ml and were incubated for 30 min at 37°C prior to addition of PHA blasts. All values are means of triplicate determinations. (Lower) LAK cell induction assay. The ability of CLMF, alone or in combination with recombinant IL-2, to induce the generation of LAK cells in 4-day cultures was assessed as described (7). Low-density peripheral blood lymphocytes were incubated in the presence of various amounts of nCLMF or rCLMF with (closed symbols) or without (open symbols) recombinant IL-2 at 7.5 units/ml. Units of CLMF activity were based on previous titrations in the T-cell growth factor assay. Hydrocortisone sodium succinate (Sigma) was included at a concentration of 0.1 mM to minimize triggering of endogenous cytokine cascades. Lysis of  $^{51}\text{Cr}$ -labeled Daudi cells was assessed at an effector/target ratio of 5:1. The data shown represent the means of quadruplicate determinations. The spontaneous  $^{51}\text{Cr}$  release was 20%.

the corresponding cDNAs now has demonstrated that there is no common precursor for the two CLMF subunits; rather, they are encoded by completely different genes. The predicted and actual amino acid composition for the two subunits are strikingly similar; differences in predicted versus actual molecular weights are accounted for by glycosylation (F. Podlaski, personal communication). Thus, the only major posttranslational proteolytic event that appears to take place in the maturation of the CLMF subunits is signal peptide cleavage.

The kinetics of expression of the individual CLMF subunit mRNAs were examined and compared to the expression of mRNAs for IL-2 and the IL-2 receptor p55. Previously it had been observed that NC-37 cells, like certain murine (14) and marmoset (15) B-cell lines, secreted IL-2 when activated (M.K.G., unpublished results). RNA blots demonstrated that upon activation of NC-37 cells, both CLMF subunit mRNAs were coordinately induced with kinetics similar to the IL-2 receptor (p55) mRNAs. On the other hand, IL-2 mRNA levels peaked much earlier. Similar differences in induction kinetics were also seen at the level of IL-2 and CLMF bioactivity secreted from NC-37 cells (M.K.G., unpublished data). These kinetic differences are consistent with our previous observation that in a cytolytic lymphocyte response, IL-2 appears to act earlier than CLMF (5).

Transfection studies with COS cells established that only coexpression of both subunit cDNAs gives rise to secreted bioactive CLMF. Thus, it appears that the two proteins have to interact within the endoplasmic reticulum to assemble properly into bioactive secreted CLMF. By comparing the activity of rCLMF to that of nCLMF in the T-cell growth factor and LAK cell induction assays (Fig. 3) and assuming that the specific activity of rCLMF is similar to that of nCLMF [ $8 \times 10^7$  units/mg (7)], we estimate that the amount of rCLMF heterodimer produced in these experiments was 5–50 ng/ml. The finding that COS cells, which are fibroblast-like cells, are able to assemble correctly the two CLMF subunits to form bioactive CLMF indicates that this secretion and processing pattern is not limited to cells of the lymphoid lineage.

Western blot analysis using an anti-CLMF antibody specific for the 40-kDa subunit has allowed confirmation that (i) COS cells transfected with both CLMF subunit cDNAs secrete CLMF with the expected heterodimeric structure and (ii) COS cells transfected with the 40-kDa subunit cDNA alone secrete that subunit (F. Podlaski, personal communication). Since no bioactivity was detected in media conditioned by COS cells transfected with only the 40-kDa subunit, that subunit by itself appears either to have a much reduced specific activity compared with heterodimeric CLMF or to be completely inactive.

Because of the lack of a high-affinity antibody specific for the 35-kDa subunit, we have not yet been able to determine definitively whether COS cells transfected with only the 35-kDa subunit cDNA secrete that subunit. Since no bioactivity was detected in the media, secretion of a bioactive 35-kDa subunit by itself could be very inefficient; alternatively, similar to the 40-kDa subunit, the protein could be much less active or inactive altogether. Intracellular 35-kDa protein in the absence of the other subunit could be inherently unstable; there is precedence for this phenomenon, since it has been reported that 90% of the  $\beta$  chains of lutropin (LH), when expressed in the absence of  $\alpha$  chains, are retained in the endoplasmic reticulum and are slowly degraded (16). Simple mixing of media conditioned by COS cells transfected separately with either one of the two CLMF subunit cDNAs did not yield bioactive CLMF. One possible explanation would be that the cells do not secrete the 35-kDa CLMF subunit by itself. More likely, our experimental conditions did not allow proper heterodimer formation. One would expect that only

carefully controlled renaturation and oxidation conditions would allow the disulfide bond formation required for generation of bioactive CLMF.

Normal human peripheral blood lymphocytes under the appropriate induction conditions produce both CLMF subunit mRNAs and secrete the active protein (N.N. and M.K.G., unpublished data). There is some evidence suggesting that CLMF is produced predominantly by B cells. In preliminary experiments, B-cell mitogens have appeared to be more effective than T-cell mitogens in eliciting CLMF production from peripheral blood lymphocytes (M.K.G., unpublished results). When screening human cell lines for their ability to produce CLMF activity (7), we observed that four of eight B-cell lines tested produced CLMF after activation with PMA and calcium ionophore, whereas none of five T-cell lines produced CLMF. Nevertheless, three of these T-cell lines secreted large amounts of IL-2 and tumor necrosis factor activity after activation (M.K.G., unpublished results). Likewise, natural killer cell stimulatory factor (NKSF), a heterodimeric cytokine similar or identical to CLMF, was isolated from RPMI 8866 lymphoblastoid B cells (17). A recent report (18) has indicated that B lymphocytes can secrete a cytokine(s) distinct from IL-2 that facilitates virus-specific cytolytic T-lymphocyte responses. It is possible that CLMF may have been the cytokine active in those studies. Thus, although B lymphocytes have not traditionally been viewed as cytokine-producing helper cells, it is conceivable that CLMF production constitutes a novel mechanism whereby B lymphocytes contribute to the amplification of T-lymphocyte responses. In addition to the biologic activities described in this report, CLMF by itself has been shown (i) to activate NK cells in an 18–22 hr assay, (ii) to facilitate the generation of specific allogeneic CTL responses, and (iii) to stimulate the secretion of  $\gamma$  interferon by resting peripheral blood lymphocytes (M.K.G., unpublished results). It can also synergize with low concentrations of recombinant IL-2 in the latter two assays and in causing the proliferation of resting peripheral blood lymphocytes. In view of its production by peripheral blood lymphocytes and its diverse actions on lymphoid cells, it appears that CLMF constitutes a new interleukin. We propose that CLMF be

given the provisional designation IL-12. The availability of recombinant CLMF will now make possible a broader and more detailed characterization of its biology.

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# Immunization With Melan-A Peptide-Pulsed Peripheral Blood Mononuclear Cells Plus Recombinant Human Interleukin-12 Induces Clinical Activity and T-Cell Responses in Advanced Melanoma

By Amy C. Peterson, Helena Harlin, and Thomas F. Gajewski

**Purpose:** Preclinical studies showed that immunization with peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMC) loaded with tumor antigen peptides plus interleukin-12 (IL-12) induced CD8<sup>+</sup> T-cell responses and tumor rejection. We recently determined that recombinant human (rh) IL-12 at 30 to 100 ng/kg is effective as a vaccine adjuvant in patients. A phase II study of immunization with Melan-A peptide-pulsed PBMC + rhIL-12 was conducted in 20 patients with advanced melanoma.

**Patients and Methods:** Patients were HLA-A2-positive and had documented Melan-A expression. Immunization was performed every 3 weeks with clinical re-evaluation every three cycles. Immune responses were measured by ELISpot assay before and after treatment and through the first three cycles, and were correlated with clinical outcome.

**Results:** Most patients had received prior therapy and had visceral metastases. Nonetheless, two patients achieved a

complete response, five patients achieved a minor or mixed response, and four patients had stable disease. The median survival was 12.25 months for all patients and was not yet reached for those with a normal lactate dehydrogenase. There were no grade 3 or 4 toxicities. Measurement of specific CD8<sup>+</sup> T-cell responses by direct ex vivo ELISpot revealed a significant increase in interferon gamma-producing T cells against Melan-A ( $P = .015$ ) after vaccination, but not against an Epstein-Barr virus control peptide ( $P = .86$ ). There was a correlation between the magnitude of the increase in Melan-A-specific cells and clinical response ( $P = .046$ ).

**Conclusion:** This immunization approach may be more straightforward than dendritic cell strategies and seems to have clinical activity that can be correlated to a biologic end point.

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MOST MELANOMA tumors express antigens that can be recognized by CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells.<sup>1,2</sup> Nonetheless, tumors frequently escape immune destruction, either from a failure to generate an optimal tumor antigen-specific T-cell response or from development of resistance to the T-cell response induced. One strategy to overcome the former hurdle is through active immunization, the opportunity for which has been facilitated by the molecular definition of melanoma antigens.<sup>3</sup> Specific CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells that are properly activated can home to tumor sites and kill tumor cells, to the extent to which they can overcome negative immunoregulatory pathways and tumor resistance.<sup>4</sup>

The optimal immunization strategy for inducing tumor antigen-specific CD8<sup>+</sup> effector T cells in humans remains undefined. However, antigen-presenting cell-based strategies have shown promise. Both monocyte-derived<sup>5,6</sup> and bone marrow-derived<sup>7</sup> dendritic cells (DCs) have been loaded with

melanoma tumor antigens and administered in the advanced-disease setting, with evidence for immunization and tumor regression in subsets of patients. However, DCs are cumbersome to generate and alternative approaches that are more straightforward yet equally as effective would be useful. One cofactor produced by DCs that contributes to their efficacy is interleukin-12 (IL-12), which facilitates the induction of interferon gamma (IFN- $\gamma$ )-producing cytolytic effector cells.<sup>8-10</sup> Endogenous IL-12 seems necessary for optimal rejection of immunogenic murine tumors<sup>11,12</sup> and provision of exogenous IL-12, either alone<sup>13</sup> or combined with tumor antigen-based vaccines,<sup>14-19</sup> can induce rejection of pre-established tumors in murine models. We previously have shown that coadministration of IL-12 with peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMCs) loaded with tumor antigen peptides induced specific cytolytic T-lymphocyte responses and tumor protection in mice, circumventing the need to generate dendritic cells.<sup>20</sup> The ease by which PBMC can be isolated from patients has made this an attractive approach for clinical translation. We recently conducted a phase I clinical study to determine the dose of recombinant human (rh) IL-12 necessary to induce T-cell responses in combination with antigen-loaded PBMCs, and found that doses from 30 to 100 ng/kg administered subcutaneously (sc) at the vaccine site were optimal and well tolerated.<sup>21</sup> The effective range of doses indicated that a straight dose of 4  $\mu$ g might be used.

In this article, we describe results of a phase II clinical study of immunization with Melan-A/MART-1<sup>3</sup> peptide-pulsed autologous PBMCs + rhIL-12 in HLA-A2-positive patients with

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advanced melanoma. Immune responses were analyzed using a direct ex vivo ELISpot assay. We show that this vaccine approach had clinical activity and that the magnitude of increased T-cell response correlated with clinical outcome.

## PATIENTS AND METHODS

### Patient Enrollment and Eligibility

This was an open-label, nonrandomized, single-institution study of Melan-A peptide-pulsed autologous PBMCs + rIL-12.<sup>4</sup> The protocol was approved by the University of Chicago Institutional Review Board and all patients signed written informed consent. Patients who were both HLA-A2-positive and showed Melan-A tumor expression by reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) were considered for inclusion. Additional inclusion criteria were life expectancy more than 12 weeks, Karnofsky performance status  $\geq 70$ , and adequate hematopoietic, renal, and hepatic function. Delayed-type hypersensitivity (DTH) skin testing was performed against mumps, *Candida*, and *Trichophyton*, not for eligibility but to correlate subsequently with clinical outcome and immunization potential. Patients were excluded if they had severe cardiovascular disease or arrhythmia, were pregnant or nursing, had biologic therapy received within 4 weeks, tested positive for hepatitis B surface antigen or human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), had clinically significant autoimmune disease or any illness requiring immunosuppressive therapy, had a psychiatric illness that would interfere with patient compliance and informed consent, had active gastrointestinal bleeding or uncontrolled peptic ulcer disease, or had uncontrolled brain metastases. Patients with treated brain metastases who were clinically and radiographically stable and did not require corticosteroids were allowed to enter onto the trial.

### Patient Characteristics

Twenty patients with metastatic melanoma were enrolled after giving written informed consent. Patient characteristics are outlined in Table 1. All patients had advanced disease; the majority had at least three sites of metastasis, 60% of which were visceral (ie, noncutaneous and nonpulmonary metastases). Approximately two thirds of the patients had received prior therapy, and 10 patients had an elevated lactate dehydrogenase (LDH) level, which is an important negative prognostic factor.<sup>22</sup> Only 45% were positive for at least one recall antigen (mumps, *Candida*, or *Trichophyton*) by DTH skin testing.

### RT-PCR Analysis

RNA was isolated from fresh tumor cells using guanidine and cesium chloride. cDNA was synthesized and PCR was performed for Melan-A and beta-actin using the primer pairs and reaction conditions described previously.<sup>21</sup> Control reactions without reverse transcriptase were performed to rule out a contribution of genomic DNA. PCR products were visualized using a 1.5% ethidium bromide-stained agarose gel. No formal quantitation was performed.

### Vaccine Preparation

Therapy consisted initially of three 21-day cycles. Vaccinations were given on the first day of each cycle and rIL-12 was administered subcutaneously on days 1, 3, and 5. Approximately 100 to 150 mL of peripheral blood from patients was collected on day 1 of each cycle into heparinized 60-mL syringes using sterile technique. PBMCs were isolated over a Lymphoprep gradient (Lymphoprep; Axis-Shield PoC, Oslo, Norway), counted, washed, and resuspended in Dulbecco's phosphate-buffered saline (DPBS) at  $40 \times 10^6$  cells/mL. At least  $10 \times 10^6$  cells from each sample were cryopreserved to prepare CD8<sup>+</sup> and CD8<sup>-</sup> fractions for subsequent correlative immunologic studies. The Melan-A<sub>27-35</sub> peptide (AAGIGILTIV) was produced according to good manufacturing practice standards by Multiple Peptide Systems (San Diego, CA) and provided in lyophilized vials. Aliquots of peptide were prepared at 5 mmol/L in dimethyl sulfoxide and stored at

Table 1. Patient Characteristics

Patient Characteristic	Patients (n = 20)	
	No.	%
Age, years		
Median	58	
Range	35-79	
Sex		
Male	9	45
Female	11	55
Karnofsky performance status (ECOG)		
90%-100% (0)	10	50
70%-80% (1)	9	45
60%-70% (2)	1	5
No. of metastatic sites		
1	2	10
2		None
$\geq 3$	18	90
Location of metastases		
Visceral	13	65
Brain (treated)	4	20
Prior therapy		
None	6	30
Chemotherapy or immunotherapy	7	35
As only prior therapy	5	25
Chemotherapy	1	5
As only prior therapy	1	5
Immunotherapy	4	20
As only prior therapy	1	5
Other*	2	10
As only prior therapy		None
Adjuvant IFN- $\alpha$	5	25
As only prior therapy	3	15
Elevated LDH	10	50
DTH recall positive	9	45

Abbreviations: ECOG, Eastern Cooperative Oncology Group; IFN- $\alpha$ , interferon alpha-2b; LDH, lactate dehydrogenase; DTH, delayed-type hypersensitivity.

\*Experimental therapy other than a melanoma vaccine, immunomodulatory cytokine, or chemotherapy.

-80°C for up to 3 months. Peptide preparations were quality controlled for HLA-A2 binding, sterility, and identity by high-performance liquid chromatography and mass spectrometry. An aliquot of peptide was diluted to 20  $\mu$ mol/L in DPBS and mixed with an equal volume of patient PBMCs (final peptide concentration, 10  $\mu$ mol/L; target number of PBMCs,  $10^8$ ) followed by incubation at 37°C for 1 hour in 10 mL DPBS. The cells were then irradiated (20 Gy), washed in DPBS, and resuspended in 1 mL DPBS. The suspension of peptide-loaded PBMCs was injected sc using a 1-mL syringe and a 21-gauge needle, divided evenly into two sites. Preferred sites were those near draining lymph node basins but not near a tumor mass. The actual number of PBMCs administered per vaccine ranged from 78 to  $100 \times 10^6$ .

rIL-12 was provided by Genetics Institute (Cambridge, MA) as a lyophilized powder of 10  $\mu$ g under vacuum. Each vial was intended for single use only and was stored as a powder in our research pharmacy at 2 to 8°C until reconstituted with sterile water for injection. Once reconstituted, rIL-12 was loaded into 3-mL syringes and used within 4 hours. rIL-12 (4  $\mu$ g) was administered sc with a 25-gauge needle just after pulsed PBMC inoculation and immediately adjacent to one of the two immunization sites on days 1, 3, and 5. The same approximate location was used for each injection of peptide-pulsed PBMCs and rIL-12 for each cycle.

### Toxicity Assessment and Criteria for Clinical Response

Toxicities were determined using the National Cancer Institute common toxicity criteria scale version 2.0. A complete response (CR) was assigned if there was disappearance of all lesions without the appearance of any new

lesions; a partial response (PR) was defined as  $\geq 50\%$  reduction in total tumor volume; a minor response (MR) was defined as less than 50% reduction in total tumor volume; progressive disease (PD) was assigned if new lesions appeared, any tumor reappeared, or if a 25% increase in tumor area was observed; a mixed response was assigned if at least one tumor decreased in size with other or new tumors growing; stable disease (SD) was anything that did not fit the aforementioned criteria. When possible, cutaneous lesions were photographed.

### CD8<sup>+</sup> T-Cell Preparation

CD8<sup>+</sup> and CD8<sup>-</sup> fractions from PBMC were isolated at the time of preparation of each vaccine and cryopreserved until analysis in batch fashion. CD8<sup>+</sup> T lymphocytes were isolated by positive selection using CD8 microbeads and magnetic columns (MACS system; Miltenyi Biotech, Auburn, CA). The unbound CD8<sup>-</sup> fraction was cryopreserved for use as antigen-presenting cells for in vitro expansion of specific CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells. Although the primary ELISpot analysis was performed directly with thawed cells, a secondary assay was carried out after in vitro expansion. For in vitro expansion, CD8<sup>-</sup> cells were thawed from each time point and pooled, pulsed with 50  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  Melan-A peptide in serum-free Iscove's modified Dulbecco's medium (IMDM) with  $\beta_2$ -microglobulin, irradiated (3,000 rad), washed, and plated at  $2 \times 10^6$  cells/well in 24-well plates. CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells were thawed and cultured with the irradiated CD8<sup>-</sup> cells at  $4 \times 10^5$  cells/well in IMDM medium containing 10% human AB serum. After 5 days, the cells were collected and plated with a new batch of Melan-A-pulsed irradiated CD8<sup>-</sup> cells. After an additional 5 days the cells were collected and tested.

### ELISpot Assays

Briefly, 96-well membrane bottomed plates (MAHA S4510; Millipore, Bedford, MA) were coated with 15  $\mu\text{g/mL}$  of antihuman IFN- $\gamma$  antibody (Mabtech, Cincinnati, OH) in PBS. The plates were washed and CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells, either freshly thawed at  $5 \times 10^4$  cells/well or after in vitro expansion at  $5 \times 10^3$  cells/well, were plated in triplicate in IMDM medium with 10% human AB serum. T2 cells (transporter associated with antigen processing-deficient cell line, American Type Culture Collection no. CRI 1992) were pulsed for 1 hour at 37°C with 50  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  peptide (either derived from HIV [ILKEPVHGV], Epstein-Barr virus [EBV; GLCTLVAML], or Melan-A [AAGIGILTV]), washed, and plated at a 5-to-1 ratio to the T cells. A replicate of CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells was stimulated with PMA (phorbol 12-myristate 13-acetate) (50 ng/mL) + ionomycin (0.5  $\mu\text{g/mL}$ ) as a positive control. After 24 hours, the cells were removed by washing with PBS + 0.05% Tween (wash buffer), and biotinylated antihuman IFN- $\gamma$  antibody was added in PBS + 0.5% fetal calf serum. The plates were incubated for 2 to 4 hours at room temperature, washed, and streptavidin-alkaline phosphatase was added for 1 hour at room temperature. The plates were then washed, BCIP-NBT (5-bromo-4-chloro-3-indolyl phosphate/nitro-blue tetrazolium) was added, and the plates were finally washed with water and allowed to air dry. Plates were scanned with an ELISpot reader (CTL Technologies, Cleveland, OH) and the number of spots per well was enumerated after the background was set on the basis of wells that had been incubated with medium alone; spot separation was adjusted using Immunospot software (CTL Technologies). For each sample, the number of T cells producing IFN- $\gamma$  in response to EBV or Melan-A peptides was determined by subtracting the number of spots seen in response to HIV peptide. The mean and SD were determined for each triplicate sample. After immunization, the time point at which peak frequencies among the first three cycles were observed was used for data analysis.

### Statistical Analysis

Comparisons between pre- and post-ELISpot frequencies were performed using a paired *t* test, and comparisons of augmented ELISpot frequencies between responders and nonresponders were made using an unpaired two-sided *t* test. Correlations between various dichotomous variables and clinical outcome were made using Fisher's exact test (two-sided). Survival data were determined using the Kaplan-Meier method, with differences among subgroups assessed by the log-rank test. All analyses were performed using SPSS software (version 8.0; SPSS Inc, Chicago, IL).

Table 2. Adverse Events

Adverse Event	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3
Fatigue	16	0	0
Anorexia	6	0	0
Fever	7	0	0
Rash	3	0	0
Headache	3	0	0
Nausea	2	0	0
Injection site reaction	5	0	0
Neutropenia	1	2	0
Thrombocytopenia	2	0	0
Hepatic	5	2	0
Creatinine	1	0	0

NOTE. Adverse events were determined using the National Cancer Institute common toxicity criteria scale version 2.0.

## RESULTS

### Immunization Treatment and Toxicities

Each 3-week cycle consisted of immunization on day 1 and sc rhIL-12 administration on days 1, 3, and 5, as described in Methods. Three cycles constituted one course of therapy and patients were evaluated for response after each course. Patients were observed as inpatients in our General Clinical Research Center for the first 24 hours of each cycle.

Adverse reactions are listed in Table 2. All but one patient completed at least three cycles of therapy. There were no grade 3 to 4 toxicities; two patients had grade 2 neutropenia and two patients had grade 2 ALT or AST elevations, which were reversible. The most common adverse reactions were fatigue and fever.

### Clinical Outcome

Clinical response outcomes are listed in Table 3. Two patients had a CR, for an overall response rate of 10%. In addition, four patients (20%) had a mixed response, one patient (5%) had an MR, four patients (20%) had SD, and the remaining nine patients (45%) had PD. The sites of tumor response were diverse. The two patients who experienced a CR both had numerous metastases of 2 cm or less and a normal LDH. One patient was female, had multiple cutaneous lesions, and no prior therapy; the other patient was male, had multiple lung lesions, and had experienced prior treatment failure from chemoimmunotherapy. Neither patient experienced a recurrence with a mean follow-up time of 28 months at the time of data analysis. Of the five other patients who showed a decrease in size of at least one tumor mass, three had responses in skin, one had a response in bone, and one had a response in an adrenal lesion. Three of the four patients with SD had visceral metastases.

Table 3. Clinical Outcome

Best Response	No. of Patients	%
Complete response	2	10
Partial response	0	0
Minor response	1	5
Mixed response	4	20
Stable disease	4	20
Progressive disease	9	45

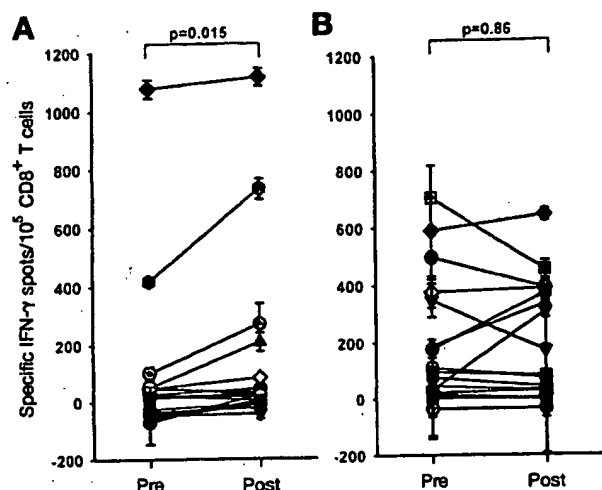


Fig 1. Interferon gamma ELISpot frequencies by CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells against Melan-A and (A) Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) (B) pre- and postimmunization. Control values with HIV peptide were subtracted out. Post- and pretreatment values were compared using a paired *t* test.

#### Peptide-Specific T-Cell Responses by ELISpot

A carefully controlled IFN- $\gamma$  ELISpot assay was used to monitor the immune response to immunization. Cryopreserved CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells were thawed in batch fashion and stimulated in triplicate directly ex vivo with T2 cells loaded with peptides derived from either HIV, EBV, or Melan-A. The HIV values were subtracted from those obtained with either Melan-A or EBV as an internal control at each time point. Seventeen of the enrolled patients had adequate cryopreserved material with which to perform immunologic assessments.

As shown in Fig 1, some patients displayed a high frequency of Melan-A-specific CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells before vaccination, with as high as 1% of CD8<sup>+</sup> cells responding to this peptide. These T cells were functional because they produced IFN- $\gamma$ . The majority of patients showed an increase in the frequency of Melan-A-specific cells after immunization ( $P = .015$ ). In contrast, the frequencies of specific CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells responding to the EBV peptide did not vary significantly overall ( $P = .86$ ). Although the changes in T-cell frequency were modest, these results demonstrate an antigen-specific response after immunization with Melan-A peptide-pulsed PBMC + rhIL-12.

The changes in Melan-A-specific ELISpot frequencies were compared among patients who had a mixed response or better and those who had no clinical response. As shown in Fig 2, the mean increase in Melan-A-specific T cells for the clinical responders was  $112 \pm 45$  and for nonresponders was  $26 \pm 16$ , indicating that a greater absolute increase in Melan-A-specific T cells was associated with tumor regression ( $P = .046$ ).

#### Survival and Associations Between Immunologic Parameters and Clinical Outcome

The overall median survival was 12.25 months and is shown in Fig 3A. Seven patients remained alive at the time of data analysis, with all patients followed beyond 12 months. Because the presence of elevated levels of serum LDH is a known

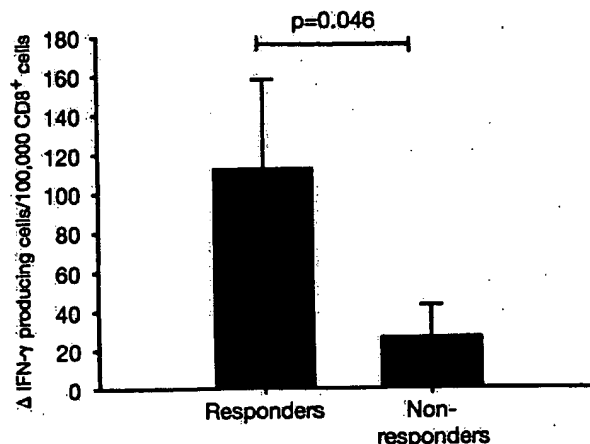


Fig 2. Comparison of increased Melan-A ELISpot frequencies after immunization between clinical responders and nonresponders. The absolute difference between Melan-A-specific ELISpot frequencies post- and pretreatment was compared between responders and nonresponders using a two-sided, unpaired *t* test.

negative prognostic factor,<sup>23</sup> survival was also compared in response to this vaccine on the basis of LDH level (Fig 3B). The median survival for patients with an elevated LDH level was 9.25 months, whereas the median had not yet been reached for those with a normal LDH ( $P = .005$ ). In addition, the median survival for patients who experienced a significant increase in Melan-A-specific T cells was not yet reached, compared with 8.5 months for patients without a significant increase in Melan-A-specific cells (Fig 3C;  $P = .120$ ).

Additional immunologic parameters that had been measured were also analyzed for associations with either clinical response or survival and are summarized in Table 4. Neither a positive recall DTH to standard antigens nor a relatively high number of EBV- or Melan-A-specific CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells before immunization correlated with either outcome. The median pretreatment Melan-A-specific T cell frequency was 23 in clinical nonresponders and -26 in responders. To increase the sensitivity of the assay to detect Melan-A-specific T cells, an in vitro expansion was performed on the preimmunization samples and analyzed by ELISpot as described in Methods. Ten patients showed high Melan-A-specific T cell frequencies after in vitro expansion. However, this also failed to correlate with clinical outcome. Finally, although a normal LDH level was associated with survival, it did not correlate with clinical response and also did not correlate with immune response. Collectively, these results reinforce the specificity of the result showing a significant association between an increased number of Melan-A-specific T cells and clinical outcome.

#### Expression of Melan-A in Resected Tumors After Immunization

It was conceivable that some patients developed PD despite immunization because of outgrowth of Melan-A-negative tumor cells. Posttreatment tumor samples were obtained from progressing tumors from three patients and analyzed by RT-PCR. Although the new metastasis that developed in patient 1 was negative for

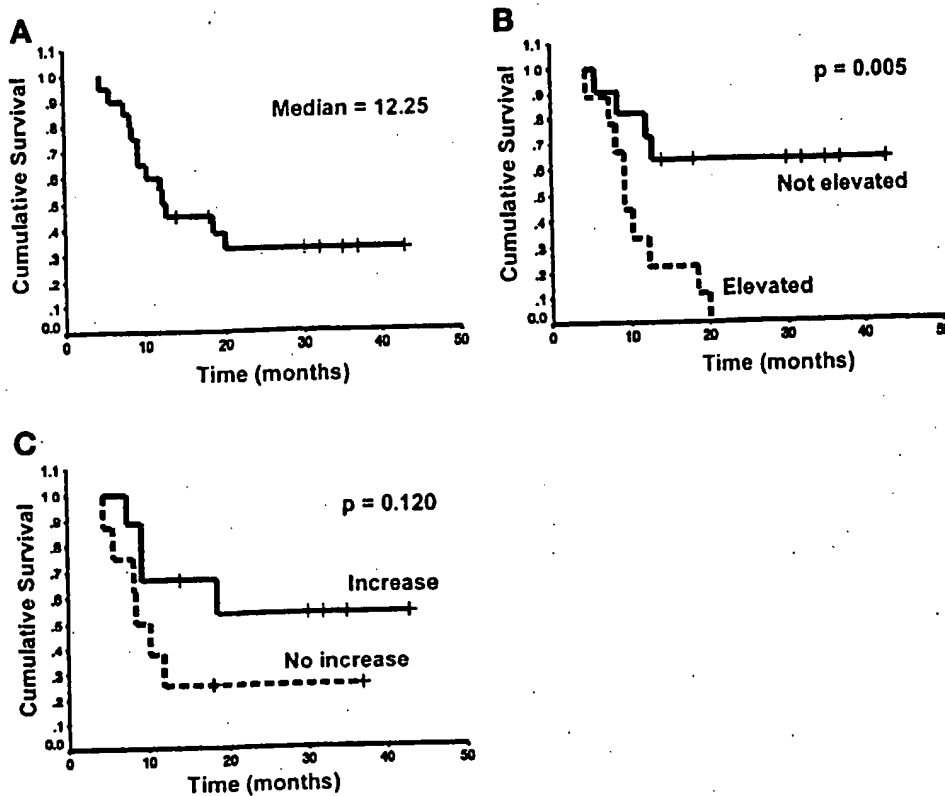


Fig 3. Overall survival for all patients (A), on the basis of serum lactate dehydrogenase greater than 200 U/L (B), and on the basis of increased Melan-A-specific interferon gamma-producing CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells (C) was determined using the Kaplan-Meier method. Differences between groups were compared using the log-rank test.

Melan-A expression, those samples from patients 4 and 6 retained detectable expression of Melan-A mRNA (Fig 1). These results indicate that, although outgrowth of antigen-negative tumors can occur, other mechanisms of resistance to immune destruction likely explain the lack of clinical response in other patients.

#### DISCUSSION

In this study we used Melan-A peptide-pulsed autologous PBMC + rhIL-12 as a vaccine to treat HLA-A2-positive patients with advanced melanoma. We observed a significant increase in Melan-A-specific IFN- $\gamma$ -producing CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells after immunization, and found a statistical association between clinical response and the magnitude of the specific T-cell increase. Although it is difficult to compare across individual, small phase II studies, these results are similar to those that have been reported using antigen-loaded dendritic cells, but with a strategy that may be more straightforward to execute.

Preparation of the peptide-loaded PBMCs typically took 5 hours from phlebotomy to injection, and quality control of the cell product was facilitated by the lack of an extended in vitro culture period and absence of exposure to culture medium or serum proteins that is required for dendritic cell preparations. Conversely, dendritic cell vaccines have been prepared in batches and cryopreserved in individual doses in some studies, which obviates the need to prepare a fresh vaccine at each time point. Cryopreservation of vaccines has not yet been examined with our current approach. A comparative trial between PBMC/rhIL-12 and dendritic cell-based vaccination may, therefore, be of interest as the technologies continue to develop. Our results

support the notion developed in preclinical models that IL-12 can contribute to effective antitumor immunity, and are consistent with the results of a recent adjuvant vaccine study using rhIL-12 in melanoma.<sup>24</sup>

We used a direct ex vivo ELISpot assay to assess antigen-specific T-cell responses in this study. Control experiments testing EBV reactivity from normal donors revealed that ELISpot analysis could be performed accurately on cryopreserved CD8<sup>+</sup> T cell samples immediately after thawing (H. Harlin and T. Gajewski, unpublished data). We found that background reactivity against the control HIV peptide varied among patients and to some extent among time points for an individual patient. The magnitude of increase in apparent Melan-A-reactive T cells would have been greater in some patients had the values obtained with the HIV control peptide not been subtracted. We believe that this experimental detail is critical because it normalizes the samples for background differences and provides an internal control for minor variation between individual vials of cryopreserved T cells. We also compared the Melan-A frequencies to those against an EBV control peptide, to determine whether the treatment was altering ELISpot results. We performed our analyses on purified CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells to control for variable numbers between patients and across time points. It is possible that we excluded subpopulations of CD8<sup>-</sup> T cells, CD4<sup>+</sup> T cells, and natural killer T cells that could have produced IFN- $\gamma$  in response to Melan-A. Nonetheless, our results revealed a measurable and significant increase in Melan-A-specific T cells posttreatment. Our currently employed ELISpot assay is distinct from the assay used in our phase I trial of peptide-pulsed

Table 4. Statistical Correlates With Response or Survival

Parameter	Correlation With Response (P)	Correlation With Survival (P)
Positive DTH recall	.642	.130
Strong EBV pre-Rx*	.131	.491
Increased EBV post versus pre†	.290	.644
Strong Melan-A pre-Rx‡	.644	.481
Increased Melan-A post versus pre†	.046	.120
Strong in vitro expansion of Melan-A§	.304	.565
LDH levels < 200	.99	.005

NOTE. Associations with response were determined using Fisher's exact test (two sided), except the differences between pre- and posttreatment, which were determined using an unpaired *t* test. Associations with survival were determined using the Kaplan-Meier method and log-rank test. Significant values are indicated in boldface.

Abbreviations: DTH, delayed-type hypersensitivity; EBV, Epstein-Barr virus; Rx, immunization; LDH, lactate dehydrogenase; HIV, human immunodeficiency virus; IL-2, interleukin-2.

\*At least 90 spots per  $10^5$  CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells after subtraction of background against a control HIV peptide.

†Changes between post- and prevaccination samples were calculated as the difference between the absolute number of specific spots and compared using an unpaired *t* test between clinical responders and nonresponders.

‡At least 40 spots per  $10^5$  CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells after subtraction of background against a control HIV peptide.

§At least 90 spots per  $10^5$  CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells after subtraction of background against a control HIV peptide, after a 10-day in vitro expansion with Melan-A peptide-pulsed autologous CD8<sup>+</sup> cells and IL-2.

PBMC + rhIL-12 and in other trials<sup>21,25</sup> in which in vitro expansion had been performed before assessment of IFN- $\gamma$  production. Analysis of T-cell responses with minimal in vitro manipulation should most accurately reflect the status of those cells in vivo.

High frequencies of Melan-A-specific, IFN- $\gamma$ -producing CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells were observed in some patients at study entry when they clearly had progressively growing melanoma. This observation indicates that the absolute frequency of functional T cells against a tumor antigen does not correlate with the behavior of the tumor. We also found no statistical association between this high frequency and clinical outcome; in fact, the two patients who experienced a CR had undetectable Melan-A-specific T cells before therapy. Although high frequencies of T cells reacting with a Melan-A tetramer have been detected in some normal donors,<sup>26</sup> those cells had a naïve surface phenotype and did not produce high levels of IFN- $\gamma$ . What did correlate with clinical response in our current study is a meaningful increase in Melan-A-specific T cells posttreatment. These increases were modest (a net gain of 112 spots per  $10^5$  CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells on average), indicating either that a subtle alteration in the steady-state between the immune response and a growing tumor in favor of increased T-cell frequencies is sufficient to translate into tumor regression, or that another immune function that we are not measuring is contributing to the final event of tumor shrinkage. Tumor regressions without detectable increases in

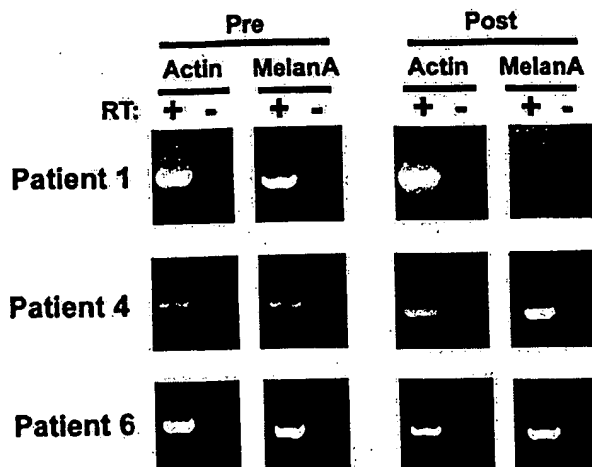


Fig 4. Melan-A expression in tumors that persisted after immunization. Three patients underwent surgical resection of lesions (after discontinuing the study), which were analyzed for Melan-A expression by qualitative reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction. Controls were analyzed without reverse transcriptase or with beta-actin primers.

T-cell frequencies using standard assays have been observed in other studies.<sup>27</sup>

The median overall survival in our study was 12.25 months from treatment initiation, which is greater than the expected 6 to 9 months for this patient population. Although it was a relatively small study and subject to selection bias, most patients were pretreated and had visceral disease, one half of the patients had elevated serum LDH levels, and four patients had treated brain metastases. As has been seen in melanoma patients treated with standard therapies, we found that an elevated serum LDH level was a negative prognostic factor for survival. Whether this is reflective of tumor burden or the metabolic state of the tumor cells that have adapted to an anaerobic environment is unclear.

Some patients developed increases in Melan-A-specific T cells and developed progressive tumor growth despite retained expression of the antigen on posttreatment biopsies. This observation is similar to that seen in murine studies<sup>28</sup> and indicates mechanisms of tumor resistance downstream from initial T-cell priming, presumably within the tumor microenvironment. Potential explanations include poor T-cell trafficking to tumor sites, presence of negative regulatory cells, T-cell anergy or death, expression of inhibitory molecules by tumor cells, or downregulation of class I major histocompatibility complex or antigen-processing molecules.<sup>29,30</sup> Future studies should investigate definable mechanisms of tumor escape that allow tumor cells to resist elimination by antigen-specific T cells in vivo.

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# Vaccination with Mage-3A1 Peptide-pulsed Mature, Monocyte-derived Dendritic Cells Expands Specific Cytotoxic T Cells and Induces Regression of Some Metastases in Advanced Stage IV Melanoma

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## Summary

Dendritic cells (DCs) are considered to be promising adjuvants for inducing immunity to cancer. We used mature, monocyte-derived DCs to elicit resistance to malignant melanoma. The DCs were pulsed with Mage-3A1 tumor peptide and a recall antigen, tetanus toxoid or tuberculin. 11 far advanced stage IV melanoma patients, who were progressive despite standard chemotherapy, received five DC vaccinations at 14-d intervals. The first three vaccinations were administered into the skin,  $3 \times 10^6$  DCs each subcutaneously and intradermally, followed by two intravenous injections of  $6 \times 10^6$  and  $12 \times 10^6$  DCs, respectively. Only minor (less than or equal to grade II) side effects were observed. Immunity to the recall antigen was boosted. Significant expansions of Mage-3A1-specific CD8<sup>+</sup> cytotoxic T lymphocyte (CTL) precursors were induced in 8/11 patients. Curiously, these immune responses often declined after the intravenous vaccinations. Regressions of individual metastases (skin, lymph node, lung, and liver) were evident in 6/11 patients. Resolution of skin metastases in two of the patients was accompanied by erythema and CD8<sup>+</sup> T cell infiltration, whereas nonregressing lesions lacked CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells as well as Mage-3 mRNA expression. This study proves the principle that DC "vaccines" can frequently expand tumor-specific CTLs and elicit regressions even in advanced cancer and, in addition, provides evidence for an active CD8<sup>+</sup> CTL-tumor cell interaction in situ as well as escape by lack of tumor antigen expression.

**Key words:** dendritic cells • vaccination • active immunotherapy • melanoma • cytotoxic T lymphocytes

It is now established that the immune system has cells, particularly CD8<sup>+</sup> CTLs, that can recognize tumor antigens and kill tumors (1, 2). Nevertheless, a major problem is that these T cells are either not induced or only weakly induced, i.e., the T cells are not evident in the systemic circulation. One possibility is that there is inadequate tumor antigen presentation by dendritic cells (DCs),<sup>1</sup> "nature's adjuvant" for eliciting T cell immunity (3). Another is that

tumor-reactive T cells are tolerized by the tumors (1, 4). Melanoma provides a compelling setting in which to pursue a current goal of cancer immunotherapy, the generation of stronger tumor-specific T cell immunity, particularly with CTLs (4). The majority of tumor antigens identified so far are expressed by melanomas (2). Limited antimelanoma CTL responses have been detected (5), and infusions of IL-2 expanded killer cells can lead to rejection of melanoma (6).

Conventional adjuvants promote antibody rather than CTL responses. Therefore, several novel strategies are being explored to induce tumor-specific T cell immunity. DC vaccination is one of these (3). Immature DCs capture

<sup>1</sup>Abbreviations used in this paper: CNS, central nervous system; DCs, dendritic cells; DTH, delayed-type hypersensitivity; MCM, monocyte-conditioned medium; RT, reverse transcriptase; TT, tetanus toxoid.

antigens but lack full T cell-stimulatory activity (7). In the presence of appropriate stimuli, such as inflammatory cytokines, the DCs mature. DCs upregulate T cell adhesion and costimulatory molecules as well as select chemokine receptors that guide DC migration into lymphoid organs for priming of antigen-specific T cells. The use of DCs as adjuvants is supported by many animal experiments with primarily mature DCs (3, 8). These studies have shown that the injection of tumor antigen-loaded DCs reliably induces tumor-specific CTL responses, tumor resistance, and in some cases, regression of metastases (3, 8). In the few pilot trials reported so far for humans, *immature* DCs have been employed (9–11). Scattered tumor responses are reported, but evidence for the induction of tumor-specific CTLs by DC vaccination has not been shown.

We have developed a technique to generate large numbers of homogenous populations of *mature* and *stable* DCs from monocytes in the absence of nonhuman proteins (12, 13). We are now exploring the use of these DCs as vaccine adjuvants in humans. Here we provide the proof of the principle by demonstrating that three intracutaneous injections of Mage-3A1 peptide-pulsed mature DCs reliably enhance Mage-3A1-specific CD8<sup>+</sup> and recall CD4<sup>+</sup> T cell immunity in heavily pretreated, progressive stage IV melanoma patients with large tumor loads. Expansions of Mage-3A1-specific CTL responses have not been previously detected after Mage-3A1 peptide vaccination in less advanced melanoma patients (14), underscoring the potent adjuvant properties of DCs. As regressions of metastases also occurred upon DC-mediated immunization and were accompanied by CD8<sup>+</sup> T cell infiltration, we propose that the induced Mage-3A1-specific CTLs are active *in vivo*.

## Materials and Methods

### Patient Eligibility Criteria

Patients were eligible if they suffered from stage IV (i.e., distant metastases) cutaneous malignant melanoma (1988 American Joint Committee on Cancer/Union Internationale Contre Cancer pTNM staging system) that was not curable by resection and was progressive despite chemo(immuno)therapy. Further inclusion criteria were an expected survival  $\geq 4$  mo, Karnofsky index  $\geq 60\%$ , age  $\geq 18$  yr, measurable disease, HLA-A1 positivity, expression of Mage-3 gene shown by reverse transcriptase (RT)-PCR in at least one excised metastasis, and no systemic chemo-, radio-, or immunotherapy within 4 wk (6 wk in the case of nitrosurea drugs) preceding the first DC vaccination. A positive skin test to recall antigens was *not* required. Important exclusion criteria were active central nervous system (CNS) metastasis, any significant psychiatric abnormality, severely impaired organ function (hematological, renal, liver), active autoimmune disease (except vitiligo), previous splenectomy or radiation therapy to the spleen, organ allografts, evidence for another active malignant neoplasm, pregnancy, lactation, or participation (or intent to participate) in any other clinical trial. Concomitant treatment (chemo- or immunotherapy, corticosteroids, investigational drugs, paramedical substances) was prohibited. Palliative radiation or surgical therapy of selected metastases and certain medications (acetaminophen/paracetamol, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, opiates) to control symptoms were allowed.

### Clinical Protocol and Study Design

The study was performed at the Departments of Dermatology in Erlangen, Würzburg, and Mainz, Germany according to standards of Good Clinical Practice for Trials on Medicinal Products in the European Community. The protocol was approved by the Protocol Review Committee of the Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research (New York, NY) and performed under supervision of its Office of Clinical Trials Management as study LUD #97-001. The protocol was also approved by the ethics committees of the involved study centers.

The study design is shown in Table II. All patients gave written informed consent before undergoing a screening evaluation to determine their eligibility. Extensive clinical and laboratory assessments were conducted at visits 1, 5, and 8 (Table II) and consisted of a complete physical examination, staging procedures, and standard laboratory values as well as special ones (pregnancy test, free testosterone in males, autoantibody profile, and antibodies to HIV-1/2, human T cell lymphotropic virus type I, hepatitis B virus, and hepatitis C virus). Patients were hospitalized and examined the day before each vaccination and were monitored for 48 h after the DC injections. Adverse events and changes in laboratory values were graded on a scale derived from the Common Toxicity Criteria of the National Cancer Institute, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD.

### Production of the DC Vaccine

During prestudy screening, we tested a small amount of fresh blood to verify that appropriate numbers of mature DCs could be generated from the patient's monocytes (12). Sufficient DC numbers could be successfully generated in all patients, but in some patients the test generation revealed that TNF- $\alpha$  had to be added to assure full maturation. To avoid repetitive blood drawings, we performed a single leukapheresis during visit 2 to generate DCs as described (13). In short, PBMCs from the leukapheresis ( $\geq 10^{10}$  nucleated cells) were isolated on Lymphoprep<sup>TM</sup> (Nycomed Pharma) and divided into three fractions. The first fraction of  $10^9$  PBMCs was cultured on bacteriological petri dishes (Cat. #1005; Falcon Labware) coated with human Ig (100  $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ ; Sandoglobulin<sup>TM</sup>; Sandoz GmbH) in complete RPMI 1640 medium (BioWhittaker) supplemented with 20  $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$  gentamicin (Refobacin 10; Merck), 2 mM glutamine (BioWhittaker), and 1% heat-inactivated human plasma for 24 h to generate monocyte-conditioned medium (MCM) for later use as the DC maturation stimulus. The second fraction of  $3 \times 10^8$  PBMCs was used for the generation of DCs for vaccination 1 and delayed-type hypersensitivity (DTH) test I. Adherent monocytes were cultured in 1,000 U/ml GM-CSF ( $10 \times 10^7$  U/mg; Leukomax<sup>TM</sup>; Novartis) and 800 U/ml IL-4 (purity  $>98\%$ ;  $4.1 \times 10^7$  U/mg in a bioassay using proliferation of human IL-4R<sup>+</sup> CTLL; CellGenix; expressed in *Escherichia coli* and produced under good laboratory practice conditions but verified for good manufacturing practice [GMP] safety and purity criteria by us) for 6 d, and then MCM was added to mature the DCs. MCM was supplemented in patients 04, 06, 09, 11, and 12 with 10 ng/ml GMP-rhu TNF- $\alpha$  (purity  $>99\%$ ;  $5 \times 10^7$  U/mg in a bioassay using murine L-M cells; a gift of Dr. G.R. Adolf, Boehringer Ingelheim Austria, Vienna, Austria) to assure full maturation of DCs. Mature DCs were harvested on day 7. The third fraction of PBMCs was frozen in aliquots and stored in the gas phase of liquid nitrogen to generate DCs for later vaccinations and DTH tests.

DCs for vaccinations were pulsed with the Mage-3A1 peptide (15) (EVDPIGHLY, synthesized at GMP quality by Clinalfa) as tumor antigen, and as a recall antigen and positive control, tetanus toxoid (TT) or tuberculin (if at visit 1 the DTH to TT in the

Multitest Merieux was >10 mm; both purchased from the Bacterial Vaccines Department of the Statens Serum Institute, Copenhagen, Denmark). The recall antigen was added at 10 µg/ml for the last 24 h, and the Mage-3A1 peptide was added at 10 µM directly to the cultures for the last 8 h (if immunity to recall antigens was strongly boosted, the dose of recall antigen was reduced to 1.0 or 0.1 µg/ml or was omitted for the intravenous DC injections to avoid a cytokine release syndrome). On day 7, mature DCs were harvested, resuspended in complete medium, washed, and pulsed once more with Mage-3A1 peptide (now at 30 µM) for 60 min at 37°C. DCs were finally washed and resuspended in PBS (GMP quality PBS; BioWhittaker) for injection. DCs to be used for Mage-3A1 DTH tests were pulsed with Mage-3A1 (but no recall antigen); DCs that served as negative control in the DTH tests were not pulsed at all. An aliquot of the DCs to be used for vaccinations was analyzed as described (13) to assure that functionally active and mature DCs were generated. The features of the DCs are described in Results. Release criteria were typical morphology (>95% nonadherent veiled cells) and phenotype (>95% HLA-DR<sup>+</sup>CD86<sup>+</sup>CD40<sup>+</sup>CD25<sup>+</sup>CD14<sup>-</sup> and >65% homogeneously CD83<sup>+</sup>).

#### Immunization Schedule

A total of five vaccinations (three into the skin followed by two intravenously) with antigen-pulsed DCs were given at 14-d intervals (Table II). This design was chosen to explore the toxicity and efficacy of various routes in this trial. For vaccinations 1–3,  $3 \times 10^6$  DCs were given subcutaneously at two sites ( $1.5 \times 10^6$  DCs in 500 µl PBS per site) and  $3 \times 10^6$  intradermally at 10 sites ( $3 \times 10^5$  DCs in 100 µl PBS per site). The injection sites were the ventromedial regions of the upper arms and the thighs close to the regional lymph nodes and were rotated clockwise. Limbs where draining lymph nodes had been removed and/or irradiated were excluded. For intravenous vaccinations 4 and 5, a total of 6 and  $12 \times 10^6$  antigen-pulsed DCs (resuspended in 25 or 50 ml PBS plus 1% autologous plasma) was administered over 5 and 10 min, respectively. Premedication with an antipyretic (500 mg acetaminophen/paracetamol p.o.) and an antihistamine (2.68 mg clemastinhydrogenfumarat i.v.) was given 30 min before intravenous DC vaccination.

#### Evaluation of Immune Status

**Recall Antigen-specific Proliferation and Cytokine Production.** PBMCs were cultured in triplicate at two dose levels ( $3 \times 10^4$  and  $1 \times 10^5$  PBMCs/well) plus or minus TT or tuberculin (at 0.1, 1, and 10 µg/ml) and pulsed on day 5 with [<sup>3</sup>H]thymidine for 12 h. In all cases, the highest cpm were obtained with the highest doses of PBMCs and antigen and are shown in Fig. 2. IL-4 and IFN-γ levels were measured in culture media by ELISA (Endogen, Inc.). In a separate plate, staphylococcal enterotoxin (SEA; Serva) was added at 0.5, 1, and 5 ng/ml, and proliferation was assessed after 3 d to provide a positive control for helper T cell viability and responsiveness.

**Enzyme-linked Immunospot Assay for IFN-γ Release from Single Antigen-specific T Cells.** To quantitate antigen-specific, IFN-γ-releasing, Mage-3A1-specific effector T cells, an enzyme-linked immunospot (ELISPOT) assay was used as described (16). PBMCs ( $10^5$  and  $5 \times 10^5$ /well) or in some cases CD8<sup>+</sup> or CD4<sup>+</sup> T cells (isolated by MACS<sup>™</sup> according to the manufacturer, Miltenyi Biotec) were added in triplicate to nitrocellulose-bottomed 96-well plates (MAHA S4510; Millipore Corp.) precoated with the primary anti-IFN-γ mAb (1-D1K; Mabtech) in 50 µl ELISPOT

medium (RPMI 1640 and 5% heat-inactivated human serum) per well. For the detection of Mage-3A1-reactive T cells, the APCs were irradiated T2A1 cells (provided by P. van der Bruggen, Ludwig Institute of Cancer Research, Brussels, Belgium) pulsed with MHC class I-restricted peptides (Mage-3A1 peptide and the HIV-1 p17-derived negative control peptide GSEELRSLY) added at  $7.5 \times 10^4$ /well (final volume 100 µl/well). After incubation for 20 h, wells were washed six times, incubated with biotinylated second mAb to IFN-γ (7-B6-1; Mabtech) for 2 h, washed, and stained with Vectastain Elite kit (Vector Labs.). For detection of TT-reactive T cells, TT was added at 10 µg/ml directly to the PBMCs ( $1$  or  $5 \times 10^5$  PBMCs/flat-bottomed 96-well plate). Assays were performed on fresh PBMCs. Spots were evaluated and counted using a special computer-assisted video imaging analysis system (Carl Zeiss Vision) as described (16).

**Semiquantitative Assessment of CTL Precursors.** The multiple microculture method developed by Romero et al. (17) was used to obtain a semiquantitative assessment of CTLp (precursors) specific for Mage-3A1 peptide. Aliquots of frozen PBMCs were thawed and assayed together. CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells were isolated with magnetic microbeads (MACS<sup>™</sup> separation columns; Miltenyi Biotec) and seeded at  $10^4$ /well in 96-well round-bottomed plates in RPMI 1640 with 10% heat-inactivated human serum. The CD8<sup>+</sup> PBMCs were pulsed with peptide Mage-3A1 or the influenza PB1 control peptide VSDGGPNLY (10 µg/ml; 30 min at room temperature), irradiated (30 Gy from a cesium source), and added as an APC population at  $10^5$ /well together with IL-2 (10 IU/ml final) and IL-7 (10 ng/ml final) in a total volume of 200 µl/well. On day 7, 100 µl fresh medium was substituted, and peptide Mage-3A1 or PB1 (1 µg/ml final) and IL-2 (10 U/ml) was added. On day 12, each microwell was divided into three equal samples to test cytolytic activity in a standard 4-h <sup>51</sup>Cr-release assay on peptide-pulsed (10 µg/ml for 1 h at 37°C) T2A1 cells, nonpulsed T2A1 cells, and K562 target cells, respectively. All of the assays were performed with an 80-fold excess of nonlabeled K562 to block NK activity. Microwells were scored positive if lysis of T2A1 targets with peptide minus lysis without peptide was ≥12% and this specific lysis was greater than or equal to twice the lysis of T2A1 targets without peptide plus six as described (18). We aimed at testing 30 microwells of  $10^4$  CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells. Therefore, 1/30 positive wells equals at least one CTLp in  $3 \times 10^5$  (i.e., 30 wells at  $10^4$  CTLp per well) CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells (corresponding to  $\sim 3 \times 10^6$  PBMCs).

**DTH.** DTH to Mage-3A1 peptide was assessed by intradermal injection at two sites of each  $3 \times 10^5$  Mage-3A1 peptide-loaded DC in 0.1 ml PBS. Negative controls were nonpulsed autologous DCs in 0.1 ml PBS and 0.1 ml PBS. DTH to seven common recall antigens (Multitest Merieux) including TT and tuberculin was performed on visits 1, 5, and 8 (Table II).

#### Assessment and Analysis of Tumor Tissue

For recruitment into the study, Mage-3 gene expression in at least one metastatic deposit had to be demonstrated by RT-PCR as described (14). Accessible superficial skin metastases were removed whenever possible after the vaccinations and subjected to Mage-3 RT-PCR as well as routine histology and immunohistology (to characterize cellular infiltrates).

#### Statistical Analysis

For analysis of the immune response, pre- and postimmunization values were compared by paired *t* test after logarithmic transformation of the data. Significance was set at  $P < 0.05$ .

## Results

### Patient Characteristics

All 13 patients were HLA-A1<sup>+</sup>, had proven Mage-3 mRNA expression in at least one excised metastasis, and suffered from advanced stage IV melanoma, i.e., distant metastases that were progressive despite chemotherapy and, in some cases, chemoimmunotherapy (Table I). We offered DCs to all patients who fulfilled the inclusion and exclusion criteria, i.e., we did not select for subsets of patients. Two patients (numbers 01 and 03) succumbed to melanoma after two and three vaccinations, respectively. 11 patients received all five planned DC vaccinations in 14-d intervals (Table II) and were thus fully evaluable.

### Quality of the Vaccine

All vaccine preparations were highly enriched in mature DCs. More than 95% of the cells were large and veiled in

appearance, expressed a characteristic phenotype by flow cytometry (HLA-DR<sup>+++</sup>CD86<sup>+++</sup>CD40<sup>+</sup>CD25<sup>+</sup>CD14<sup>-</sup>), and acted as strong stimulators of an MLR at DC/T cell ratios of  $\leq 1:300$  (13). Most (mean 80%) expressed the CD83 mature DC marker (19). These features were stable upon removal of cytokines and culture for one to two more days (13). The DCs were pulsed with Mage-3A1 peptide as a tumor antigen and TT or tuberculin as a recall antigen. The latter were internal controls for immunization and possibly provided help for CTL responses (20).

### Toxicity

No major (above grade II) toxicity or severe side effects were observed in any patient, including the two patients who were not fully evaluable. We noticed, however, local reactions (erythema, induration, pruritus) at the intracuta-

Table I. Patients' Characteristics, Status before DC Vaccination, and Response to DC Vaccination

Patient code	Sex-Age	Onset stage IV	Previous therapy	Metastases at study entry <sup>†</sup>							Clinical Response	Survival
				regional		distant					14 days after the 5 <sup>th</sup> vaccination	
				skin	LN	Skin	LN	Lung	Liver	Other		
Patients with objective tumor regression												
04	M48	1/98	PCI				1/15	m/20		CNS 2/12	complete regression of all but 1 lung metastasis, overall progression	10 + >9
06	F61	10/97	CI			3/19		m/20	2/10		complete regression <sup>o</sup> of 1 lung + 4 s.c. <sup>a</sup> metastases, overall progression	6 + >16
07	F48	6/97	C			1/7				ovary 1/80 bone 3/30	complete regression <sup>o</sup> of 1 lung <sup>a</sup> + 2 s.c. <sup>a</sup> metastases, overall progression	13 + 12†
08	M67	11/97	PC		2/5		m/30	2/20	2/30		complete regression <sup>o</sup> of lung + liver + 4 s.c. <sup>a</sup> metastases, overall progression <sup>o</sup>	8 + 3†
09	F43	5/98	C					1/20		mediast. 1/45 bone 2/m.d.	Partial regression of 1 lung metastasis, overall progression	4 + >11
12	M54	9/98	CI			7/80	m/15	m/20			partial regression of axillary LN metastases, overall progression	28 + >9
Patients without objective tumor regression												
02	F73	5/98	PCI	>50/40			m/28	m/10	m/85	panc. 1/10	continuous progression	18 + 5†
05	F49	10/97	CI		1/10		2/15	m/10			continuous progression	5 + >17
10	M62	8/98	C	6/70		1/30					continuous progression	1 + 6†
11	F72	7/98	C		m/25	2/15		3/12		bone 1/m.d.	continuous progression	4 + 9†
13	M34	12/97	CI				1/25		m/25	spleen 1/m.d.	continuous progression	12 + 5†

Treatment centers: three patients (04, 08, and 12) were treated in Wuerzburg, two in Mainz (patients 10 and 13), and the others in Erlangen.

Pretreatment therapy: PCI, polychemoimmunotherapy. Preceding excisions and radiotherapies are not listed.

Metastases at study entry: the number and diameter of the largest metastases present at study entry are listed (number/diameter in millimeters).

m, multiple (>3 metastases). Survival: (since onset of stage IV and as of 5 August 1999) is listed as months since onset stage IV until study entry + number of months since study entry. †Patient deceased.

\*CNS metastases were regressing at study entry after gamma knife treatment.

<sup>a</sup>Developed (in part) after study entry.

<sup>o</sup>Determined by autopsy.

\*Sudden death from bleeding into CNS metastasis on visit 8.

\*The regressions of lung metastases in patients 06 and 07 were documented at a staging 3 mo after visit 8. mediast., mediastinum; panc., pancreas.

Table II. Study Design

Activities	Screen	Leuka pheresis	Vacc. #1 3 Mio s.c. 3 Mio i.d.	Vacc. #2 3 Mio s.c. 3 Mio i.d.	Vacc. #3 3 Mio s.c. 3 Mio i.d.	Vacc. #4 6 Mio i.v.	Vacc. #5 12 Mio i.v.	Final Evaluation
Clinical visit	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Day	-28/-14	-9	+1	+14	+28	+42	+56	+70
Vaccination			X	X	X	X	X	
Multitest Merieux	X				X			X
DTH to Mage-3A1 peptide-loaded DC			X		X		X	
Recall-antigen proliferation		X						X
CTLP analysis		X				X		X
ELISPOT Mage-3A1		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
ELISPOT recall antigen		x	x	x	x	x	x	x

X, prespecified in the protocol as obligatory; x, optional.

neous vaccination sites that increased with the number of vaccinations. In 9/11 patients, strong DTH reactions (induration >10 mm in diameter) were noted to DCs carrying a recall antigen (Fig. 1). Elevation of body temperature (grade I and II fever) was observed in most (9/11) patients and was also related to pulsing DCs with recall antigen. The most striking example was patient 02, who progressively developed fever (up to 40°C) upon successive vaccinations but did not show a rise in body temperature when TT was omitted for the final (fifth) vaccination. We observed slight lymph node enlargement, clinically in 63% and by sonography in 83% of patients, after the intracutaneous DC injections. Interestingly, these were delayed, being inapparent during the 2 d of monitoring after vaccinations but detected when patients were investigated again the day before the next vaccination (Table II).

#### Immunological Responses

**Boosting of Recall Antigen-specific Immunity.** PBMCs that had been frozen before vaccination and 14 d after vaccination 5 were thawed and assayed together, as specified in the protocol (Table II). In most patients, a significant boost of antigen-specific immunity developed to TT (and tuberculin in patient 10) ( $P < 0.004$ ; Fig. 2). Supernatants from the proliferative assays contained large amounts of IFN- $\gamma$  (mean 1,679 pg/ml, range 846–4,325) but little IL-4 (IFN- $\gamma$ /IL-4, 317:1). In five patients, we studied the kinetics of the immune response to TT by IFN- $\gamma$  ELISPOT analysis. We found an increase after the intracutaneous vaccinations ( $P < 0.02$ ) but a peculiar decrease after the intravenous vaccinations ( $P < 0.008$ ; Fig. 3). Thus, comparing recall immunity before and after all five vaccinations (Fig. 2) as prespecified in the protocol (Table II) obviously underestimated the extent of boosting.

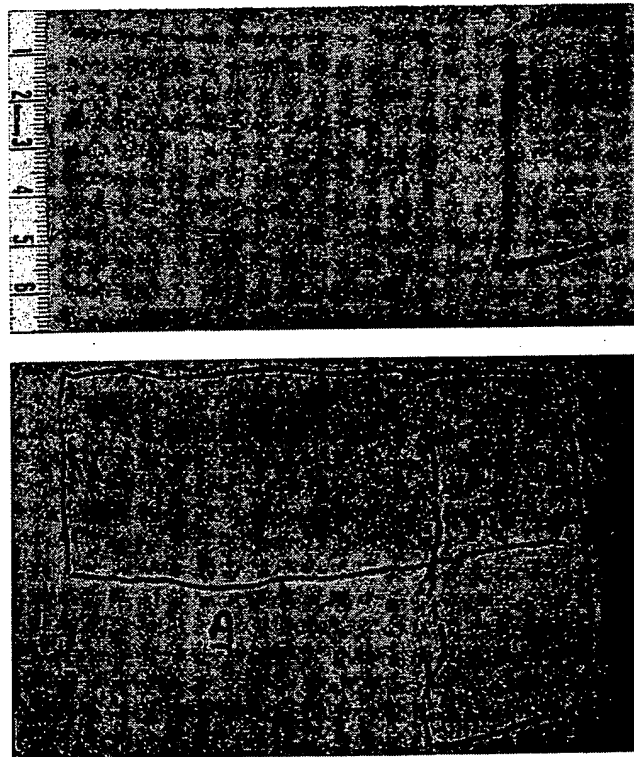


Figure 1. Local reactions to DCs carrying Mage-3A1 peptide and TT at the intradermal and subcutaneous vaccination sites in patient 09 (24 h after vaccination 2; top panel) and 02 (48 h after vaccination 3; bottom panel). Erythema at the 10 intradermal (left) and 2 subcutaneous (right) vaccination sites was followed by induration >10 mm in diameter (with secondary purpura in patient 02). These local reactions represent strong DTH reactions to DCs carrying TT, as such strong reactions did not occur in response to unpulsed DCs or DCs pulsed with Mage-3A1 peptide alone in DTH tests I–III (Table II; reactions not shown).

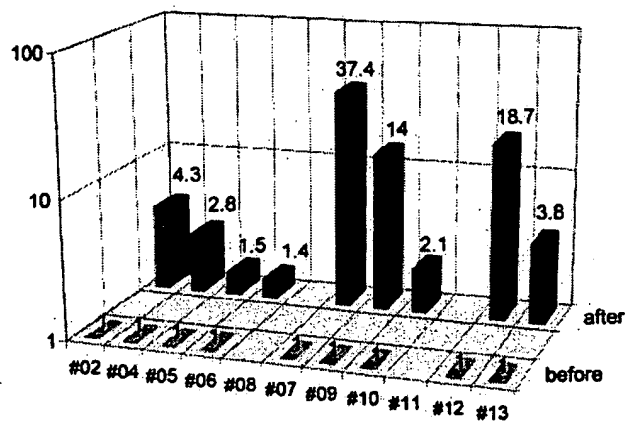


Figure 2. Recall antigen-specific immunity (tuberculin in patient 10; TT in all others) as assayed by antigen-specific proliferation. The cpm values determined after therapy (14 d after vaccination 5) are shown as multiples of pretherapy cpm values. Absolute cpm (cpm with recall antigen minus cpm without antigen) after therapy was 68,917 in patient 02, 85,225 in patient 04, 16,759 in patient 05, 7,913 in patient 06, 16,367 in patient 07, 107,923 in patient 09, 22,790 in patient 10, 4,507 in patient 12, and 1,831 in patient 13 (SEM for all measurements was <20%). Patients 08 and 11 could not be evaluated due to shortage of cells after therapy.

**Expansion of Mage-3A1-specific CTLp.** Aliquots of PBMCs, frozen before the first and after the third and fifth vaccinations, were thawed at the same time (Table II) and subjected to a semiquantitative recall assay for CTLp (reference 17; Fig. 4). Before vaccination, CTLp frequencies were low or undetectable. In 8/11 patients, we found a significant expansion of Mage-3A1-specific CTLp as indicated by the increase (mean, eightfold;  $P < 0.008$ ) of positive microcultures in the multiple microculture procedure employed for the semiquantitative assessment of CTLp (17). Interestingly, in six patients, the CTLp frequencies were maximal after the three intracutaneous vaccinations ( $P < 0.0013$ ) but then decreased after the two additional intravenous vaccinations in all but one of these patients ( $P < 0.026$ ). Only in 1/11 patients did we observe an increase of CTLp to an irrelevant PB1 influenza peptide that served as a specificity control (not shown).

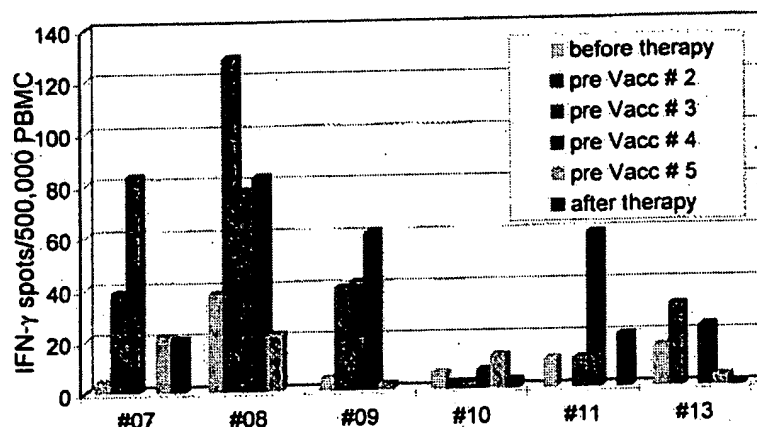


Figure 3. Kinetic analysis of immunity to recall antigens as assessed by TT-specific IFN- $\gamma$  ELISPOT (SEM for all measurements was <20%). Blood was drawn (see Table II, Study Design) before the first DC vaccination and then every 14 d just before administration of the next DC vaccination (e.g., pre Vacc # 2 means immediately before vaccination 2, i.e., 14 d after vaccination 1), and finally after therapy. Time points at which vaccinations were not performed lack bars. Note the increase after the intracutaneous vaccinations and the decline upon the two vaccinations after intravenous ones. Patient 10, who received tuberculin-pulsed DCs, exhibited no significant change in the TT-specific IFN- $\gamma$  ELISPOT as expected.

**ELISPOT Analysis for IFN- $\gamma$ -releasing, Mage-3A1-specific T Cells.** We also tried to detect Mage-3A1-specific CTL effectors in uncultured fresh, nonfrozen PBMCs by performing ELISPOT analyses at 14-d intervals on all patients. A significant increase of Mage-3A1-reactive IFN- $\gamma$  spot-forming cells was apparent only in patients 07 and 09 after the first and second vaccinations, respectively, but the frequency of Mage-3A1-specific effectors was very high (~5,000 and 10,500/10<sup>7</sup> CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells; not shown).

**DTH Test to Mage-3A1 Peptide-loaded DCs.** Tests of DTH to Mage-3A1 peptide-loaded DCs yielded erythema and/or induration (>5 mm diameter) in 7/11 patients (not shown). The results were, however, equivocal due to the frequently observed background to nonpulsed DCs (up to 10 mm in diameter) and the variability from test site to test site.

### Clinical Responses

At the end of the trial, i.e., ~2 wk after the fifth vaccination (Table II), we observed temporary growth cessation of some individual metastases, but more intriguingly, in 6/11 patients, complete regression of individual metastases in skin, lymph nodes, lung, and liver (Table I and Fig. 5). Resolution of skin metastases was found in three patients (Table I, patients 06, 07, and 08) and in two of them (06 and 07), it was preceded by local pain, itching, and slight erythema. The six regressing skin lesions of patients 06 and 07 (Table I) were also excised and examined by immunohistology. Clusters of CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells were seen around and in the tumor, the latter often necrotic, suggesting an immune attack (Fig. 6).

In patients 06 and 08, the metastases excised at study entry (four and two, respectively) proved to be Mage-3 mRNA<sup>+</sup>. However, all of the samples removed at the end (two and six, respectively) were Mage-3 mRNA<sup>-</sup>, suggesting immunoselection for antigen-negative tumor cells. Remarkably, significant infiltration of CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells was not found in any of these lesions.

### Discussion

In deciding on the source of DCs for this phase I trial, we selected *mature*, monocyte-derived DCs for the follow-

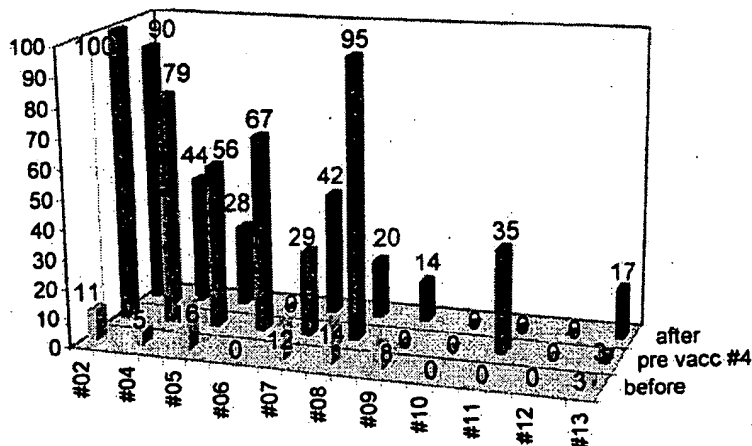


Figure 4. Mage-3A1 CTLp frequency analysis as assessed by semiquantitative recall assay. The y-axis and the numbers above the bars indicate the percentage of positive wells found before vaccination 1, before vaccination 4 (14 d after vaccination 3), and after therapy (usually 14 d after vaccination 5).

ing reasons. Monocyte-derived DCs currently represent the most homogenous and potent DC populations, with several defining criteria and quality controls (12, 13, 21). The method for generating production of these DCs is very reproducible and allows the cryopreservation of large numbers of cells at an identical stage of development (12, 13). Furthermore, these DCs can be produced in the absence of potentially hazardous FCS (12, 13, 21). FCS exposure also leads to large syngeneic T cell responses in culture, so their clinical use (11) might produce nonspecific immunostimulatory effects. Unlike other investigators (9–11), we chose to use mature rather than immature DCs for our first melanoma trial. The DCs that have been used with efficacy in animal experiments were primarily mature (3, 8). Mature DCs are much more potent in inducing CTL and Th1 responses in vitro (reference 22 and Jonuleit, H., A. Gieseke, A. Kandemir, L. Paragnik, J. Knop, and A.H. Enk, manuscript in preparation), and the DCs are also resistant to the immunosuppressive effects of IL-10 (23) that can be produced by tumors (24–26). Mature DCs also display an extended half-life of antigen-presenting MHC class I (26a) and class II molecules (27). Finally, mature DCs have a high migratory activity (21) and express CCR7 (28), a receptor for chemokines produced constitutively in

lymphoid tissues (28). Mature DCs, as used in this cancer therapy trial, have recently also been shown to rapidly generate broad T cell immunity in healthy subjects (28).

Mature DCs were loaded with only one melanoma peptide, Mage-3A1, to avoid uncertainties regarding loading of DCs with multiple peptides (11) of varying affinity and off rate. Successful loading was verified with a Mage-3A1-specific CTL clone and ELISPOT analysis (not shown). The Mage-3A1 peptide (15) was selected for several reasons. It is essentially tumor specific (2) and expressed in tumors other than melanoma (2), and the Mage-3A1 epitope is likely a rejection antigen (14). Moreover, the Mage-3A1 CTLp frequency is exceedingly low in noncancer patients (reference 18; 0.4–3 per  $10^7$  CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells) as well as in cancer patients, even after peptide vaccination (14). Thus, any induction or boost of Mage-3A1 CD8<sup>+</sup> T cell responses would indicate a significant superiority in the adjuvant capacities of DCs.

DTH assays with peptide-pulsed DCs were carried out as described by Nestle et al. (11) to detect Mage-3A1 immunity (not shown). However, we did not detect unequivocal DTH. This was due to the frequently observed background to nonpulsed DCs (possibly due to cytokine production by DCs) and the noteworthy variability from test site to test site. As Mage-3A1-specific T cells are CD8<sup>+</sup>

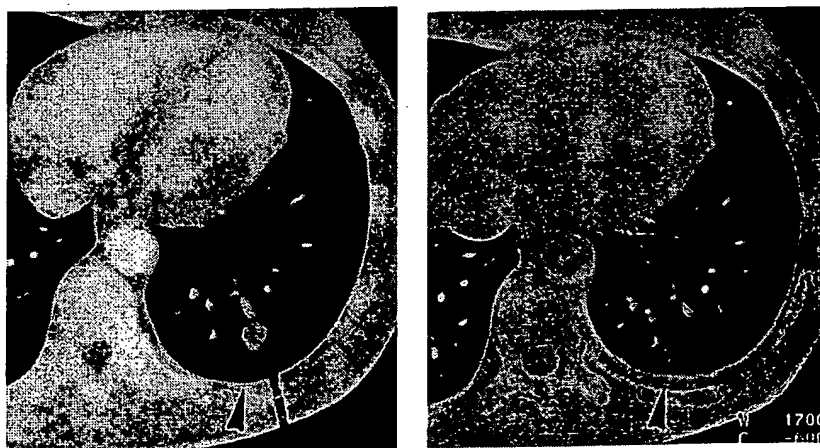
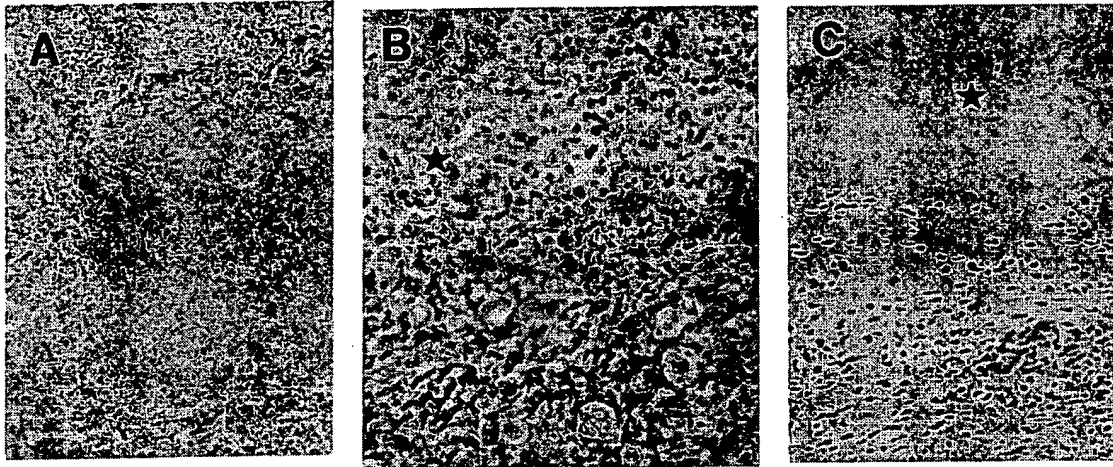


Figure 5. Regression (arrows) of a globular (13 mm in diameter) lung metastasis in patient 07 that was then no longer detectable in serial 6-mm-thick computed tomography scans.





**Figure 6.** Regressing subcutaneous metastases in patient 06 display a CD8<sup>+</sup> lymphocytic infiltrate (alkaline phosphatase/antialkaline phosphatase immunohistochemical staining with anti-CD8 mAb) that surrounds (A) and infiltrates (B) the tumor. Areas of damaged (B, ★) and necrotic (C, ★) melanoma cells are obvious in the vicinity of the CD8<sup>+</sup> T cell infiltrate. The metastasis expressed Mage-3, as demonstrated by RT-PCR (data not shown). Magnifications: A, 100; B, 250; C, 160.

T cells and DTH assays typically detect primed CD4<sup>+</sup> T cells, we suspect that DTH to MHC class I peptide-pulsed DCs may also for this reason prove not to be a sensitive or reliable way to monitor specific CD8<sup>+</sup> T cell-mediated immunity.

In contrast, we found sizable expansions of Mage-3A1-specific CTL precursors in PBMCs from a majority (8/11) of patients ( $P < 0.008$ ; Fig. 4). This is an important proof of the principle of DC-based immunization, and it is also significant from the point of view that tumors can induce tolerance or anergy. It is very promising that CTLp expansions can be induced in far advanced and heavily pretreated stage IV melanoma patients. However, active Mage-3A1-specific effectors were generally not observed in ELISPOT assays, except for in two patients with high frequencies ( $>5,000/10^7$  CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells). Perhaps active CD8<sup>+</sup> effectors were rapidly sequestered in the numerous metastases, as suggested by the biopsy studies illustrated in Fig. 6. An alternative explanation is that looking for effectors in peripheral blood 14 d after a preceding vaccination might simply be too late.

Interestingly, in six patients, CTLp had increased to their highest levels after the three intracutaneous vaccinations ( $P < 0.0013$ ) and then decreased ( $P < 0.026$ ) with subsequent intravenous immunizations (Fig. 4). The decrease in CTLp might be due to emigration of activated Mage-3-reactive CTLs into tissues, tolerance induction, or clonal exhaustion via the intravenous route. We also observed decreased responses to recall antigens in the five patients that we studied before and after intravenous vaccination (Fig. 3). The effect of the intravenous route requires additional study, as it may be counterproductive. In contrast, our results clearly demonstrate that the intracutaneous route is effective, so that the less practical intranodal injection propagated by other investigators (11) does not seem essential. It will, however, be necessary to compare subcutaneous and intradermal routes to find out if one is superior.

We found regression of individual metastases in 6/11 patients when patients were staged 14 d after the fifth vaccination (Table I). This percentage of responses was unexpected in far advanced stage IV melanoma patients who were *all* progressive despite standard chemotherapy and even chemolimmunotherapy. In the study by Nestle et al. (11), chemotherapy was only given to 4/16 melanoma patients, and objective tumor responses were observed in 5/16. Therefore, we attribute the regressions to DC-mediated induction of Mage-3A1-specific CTLs. This interpretation is supported by the heavy infiltration with CD8<sup>+</sup> T cells of regressing but not nonregressing (skin) metastases. The observation that all of the metastases in patients 06 and 08 that were excised at the end of the study were Mage-3 mRNA<sup>+</sup> (whereas those removed at the onset were uniformly positive) suggests immune escape of and selection for Mage-3 antigen-negative tumors. Immune escape might also have been responsible for the lack of tumor response in those nonresponders that had mounted a Mage-3A1-specific CTL response.

After the end of the trial, surviving patients received further vaccinations with DCs and several tumor peptides (Mage-1, tyrosinase, and Mage-3) that were no longer part of the protocol. It is encouraging that 5/11 patients are still alive (Table I) 9–17 mo after study entry, as the expected median survival in patients progressive after chemo(immuno)therapy is only 4 mo (29, 30). One of the initial responders (patient 06) has recently experienced a complete response and has now been disease free for 2 mo. It is interesting that Marchand et al. (14) have also observed that regressions, once they have started, proceed slowly and may take months to complete.

In conclusion, the use of a defined DC vaccine combined with detailed immunomonitoring provides proof that vaccination with mature DCs expands tumor-specific T cells in advanced melanoma patients. In addition, we have found some evidence for the direct interaction between

CD8<sup>+</sup> CTLs and tumor cells as well as for escape of antigen-negative metastases. We are convinced that DC-mediated immunization can be intensified further to reveal the presence of expanded populations of effector cells. Efficacy might be increased at the level of the DC, e.g., by optimizing

variables such as DC maturational state, route, dose, and schedule or by improving the short life span of DCs in vivo (31, 32); at the level of the T cell, e.g., by providing melanoma-specific CD4<sup>+</sup> T cell help (33, 34) or IL-2 (35); and by treating patients earlier in their disease course.

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